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CHRIST  
FOR THE  
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B.A.



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# CHRIST FOR THE WORLD

SERMONS IN CONNECTION  
WITH  
THE CENTENARY OF THE LONDON  
MISSIONARY SOCIETY.

BY  
J. GUINNESS ROGERS, B.A.

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To

R. W. DALE, D.D., LL.D.,

THE MOST TRIED AND TRUSTED OF COMRADES,  
THE MOST VALUED OF FRIENDS, FELLOW-SOLDIER  
AND FELLOW-WORKER UNTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD,  
THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED, IN GRATEFUL RE-  
MEMBRANCE OF THE PLEASURE AND PROFIT  
OF MANY YEARS OF THE CLOSEST  
AND MOST CONFIDENTIAL  
FELLOWSHIP.



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## PREFACE.

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THE ten sermons contained in this volume are intended to prepare for the Centenary of the London Missionary Society. They are based on a profound conviction that in the awakening of the Churches to a deeper sense of their responsibility for the conversion of the world is the best hope for the revival of their own spiritual power at home. I fear that the Missionary enterprise is not always regarded as so integral and essential a part of the Church's work that a man who stands aloof from it gives just reason for doubting the reality of his own faith in Jesus Christ. My object is to place the claims of the work on this high platform, and to regard it as a matter not of expediency or of noble impulse, but of positive obligation about which there can be no hesitation. The claims of the Society are very urgent. The present is a crisis in its history, a crisis due entirely to the strong impulses which have stirred the hearts of many of its members, and to the increased opportunities which, in the providence of God, are con-



tinually presenting themselves. The existing financial deficiency is due to these causes, and not to any failure of contributions. The urgent question of the moment is whether the Churches will not only maintain the present extended scale of operations, but complete the original idea of the Forward Movement. The directors are only the executive of the Churches. The appeal of these sermons is addressed to the Churches. The responsibility of their present position is sufficiently onerous. Not only the prosperity of the London Missionary Society, but their own spiritual future is largely dependent on their present decision. There has seldom been a crisis to which the warning of the old Jewish leader is more applicable: "If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall perish: and who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

J. GUINNESS ROGERS.

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NOTE.—The sermons on the "Church and the World" are a revival of a discourse preached more than thirty years ago. It has been so often even in recent days been referred to by friends, that I have been induced to recast and revise it. But as the original MS. was wanting, all I can say is that the sermon has been constructed on the original lines.

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*MISSIONARY ENTHUSIASM.*





## MISSIONARY ENTHUSIASM.\*

“For whether we are beside ourselves, it is unto God ; or whether we are of sober mind, it is unto you ; for the love of Christ constraineth us.”—2 Cor. v. 13, 14.

PAUL the apostle was pre-eminently a great missionary. The apostle of Jesus Christ was really the missionary of Jesus Christ. Our composite language borrows words first from one source and then from another, so two words will often be found which, though different in form, express precisely the same idea. Thus, *apostle* has come to us from the Greek, *missionary* from the Latin. We cherish the one name in special sanctity as belonging to those who received a commission direct from the Lord Himself. There is propriety in the distinction, but it is well also to remember in their radical idea the two words are one—that the apostles were only the first and most conspicuous of a long band of missionaries ; that when Paul speaks of himself as called to be an apostle, what he really means is that he was set apart as a missionary of the Cross.

\* Anniversary Sermon preached in the City Temple on behalf of the London Missionary Society.

It was his singleness of heart in his devotion to this work which exposed him to the contemptuous treatment which has for ever linked the name of Festus in suggestive connection with his. It is one of the revenges of Time that the Roman governor, who from the tribunal of justice hurled his petty and unworthy insult at the helpless prisoner, would have passed into the oblivion which has overtaken his class had he not imputed madness to a man whose words of truth and soberness still shake the world with power. The ire of the haughty Roman noble was roused by the simple unfolding by Paul of his great commission.

A cynical voluptuary, who had no horizon beyond that of his own selfish ambitions, must have listened with unutterable amazement to the story of the "heavenly vision." The man who could be so infatuated as to sacrifice all his worldly prospects in obedience to a dream like that, could be to him only an unintelligible phenomenon. Festus was an incarnation of the spirit of a class so vividly described by Matthew Arnold:—

"On that hard Pagan world disgust  
And secret loathing fell.  
Deep weariness and sated lust  
Made human life a hell.

In his cool hall, with haggard eyes,  
The Roman noble lay;  
He drove abroad, in furious guise,  
Along the Appian way.

He made a feast, drank fierce and fast,  
And crown'd his hair with flowers—  
No easier and no quicker pass'd  
The impracticable hours."

Still Festus listened as the apostle told his thrilling tale—possibly with extreme, even irritable impatience, yet awed into silence, perhaps by the intense earnestness of the speaker, perhaps by the courtesy which constrained a Roman governor on the judgment-seat, perhaps by sheer astonishment in view of a man so unlike any he had ever seen before. But when, with kindling enthusiasm and fervid eloquence, Paul passed on to declare that he lived only to preach this gospel to the world, all the barriers of self-respect, of regard to the dignity of his office, of the chivalry proper to justice and power, were swept away. Festus lost self-command, forgot that he was a Roman gentleman and a judge, and that before him was a helpless prisoner, and, with rudeness that was almost brutal, he shouts, "Thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." As the ravings of a harmless fanatic, Paul's strange illusions might be tolerated; when he proclaimed his intention to give his life to convert the world he became a public danger. "Having obtained the help that is from God, I stand unto this day testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come, how that the Christ must suffer, and how that He first by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light both to the people and

to the Gentiles." When he made a similar announcement as to his missionary character to the Jews, they met it with one universal howl, "Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live." When he repeats it to Festus, the answer is, "Thou art mad." The "pious opinions" of a dreamer who lived upon them but did not disturb others were one thing; the propagandism of a restless enthusiast, who had given his life to convert the world, was an entirely different one. The missionary was a dangerous madman, who must be repressed.

Paul's reply to Festus, taken in connection with the words of the text, is a complete statement of his own case. Festus was met—as alone he could be met—with a dignified and firm assertion that the apostle's words were words of truth and soberness. To the Corinthians there is a fuller vindication of his actual position. There is no abatement of the strong assurance expressed in those ringing accents of faith in reply to the Roman governor, but there is a justification of himself to his friends to which he would not stoop when rebuking the insolence of Festus.

The world's wisdom is always foolishness with God, and so, judged by its tests, Paul might be held to be beside himself; but if so it was for God. But there was an entirely different side to his conduct. Though possessed with a Divine passion which he neither desired nor was able to limit or confine, in his obedience to it he used that sober-mindedness which he inculcated on others. For their sake—

his disciples, his friends, his children in Christ—for the sake of men everywhere, for whose salvation he toiled and prayed and wept, he used all the resources of that mighty intellect with which God had endowed him. The fervour of a glowing enthusiasm which the world, and possibly some even of his own brethren, thought madness, and which would be madness if it were not justified by the energy and wisdom that sought to make it a conquering force in the world, was not enough for him. Beyond that must be adaptation, variety of method, wise use of all talents and all opportunities. But all that was for their sake.

Paul is the representative of the Missionary spirit, and that spirit has to-day to face the self-same criticism as that with which he thus deals. I have not dwelt thus long upon him as an individual merely as a piece of character-painting, but because in setting forth his position I am really pleading the case of our Missionary Society. It accepts the maxims which Paul here lays down as its own, and only in so far as it acts upon them can it hope for success.

The scene in that palace at Cæsarea is strange enough to us here in this nineteenth century, meeting under the shadow of a cathedral whose very name commemorates the triumph of the man on whom Festus and his companions looked down with ill-concealed scorn. Of all that was imposing and impressive then nothing remains. The names of



Agrippa and Bernice are names and little more. Festus has left nothing behind but the evil reputation of the scoffing unbeliever. The Imperial majesty of the Cæsars, to which the city owed its fame and glory, is a memory, and a memory at least as much despised as honoured. Rome itself is as a city of departed splendour and power, visited for what she was rather than what she is, with nothing in all her monuments of the glory that has passed away more full of tender interest than those catacombs which recall her fruitless struggle against the conquering faith which Paul preached. Verily, as the apostate Emperor confessed, "Thou art victorious, O Nazarene." For the only living force which remains from the pomp and circumstance of that day is the gospel, the preacher of which Festus pronounced to be mad.

But pitiful and foolish as the words sound as they come down to us blended with the echoes of eighteen centuries, in which Christianity has fought so many a good fight and won so many a noble victory, the extraordinary fact is that, by actors bearing different names, the old drama is being continually re-enacted. The spirit of Festus is not dead, and, strange to say, it is sometimes incarnate in men who profess to be servants of the Lord for whom Paul preached. Paul himself they admire, honour, appeal to as a great theological authority. They are zealous for his doctrine; unhappily, they have not caught his spirit. Festus expressed the judgment of the world on the

great missionary and his work. The world of to-day, even in this Christian land, is at heart just as sceptical of the same great enterprise, and the difficulty is to purge even Christian spirits of the leaven of unbelief. The world-spirit has so thoroughly permeated thought, imagination, purpose, it so fires the ambition of the heart, it works so subtly and is helped by so many influences, that it is not easily expelled.

Of course, where there is no living faith in Christ there can be no zeal for Christian missions. Where the Lord is not loved, is not known, is not trusted, there can be no desire for the coming of His kingdom—certainly no inspiring sense of our personal obligation to work for its triumph. The children of this world treat any suggestion of the kind as a sign of a fanaticism which places those who are under its influence outside the pale of reason. They do not argue—why should they stoop to discuss with slaves of sentiment? It is curious, indeed, to mark how they will sometimes honour the men whose sole distinction is that they have been great missionaries. But if the man has compelled this tribute, more or less hollow, to his personal power, they do not the less despise all he most values. A Moffat may receive flattery and homage from men who have never had any sympathy with his life-work. It is only one of the freaks of Society which will thus occasionally take up a self-sacrificing worker for Christ, make his welcome the sensation of the hour, and inflict on him the degradation of

becoming one of its lions. But to the missionary enterprise its attitude remains unchanged.

The melancholy, unintelligible fact is that there are those who profess and call themselves Christians who partake of the same spirit. Probably they would not directly traverse the command of Christ, nor express a disbelief in the obligation to work for the gathering in of the heathen. But they have pleas innumerable why they should be excused from such service. They are not sure that the work is well and wisely done. They have friends who have visited India or China, who know nothing about missionaries there. For themselves they prefer work at home, where there is so much to be done. The cause of this doubtful attitude, in which there is really more of hostility than is expressed, lies much deeper. It is the world-spirit which works within them—which makes the ventures of faith appear nothing better than the extravagances of madness. Almost unconsciously it insinuates its hard, cold, cynical views; fosters a selfish and often sneering faithlessness; masks its want of heart under the pretence of a practical wisdom, of which it boasts a monopoly, fancying itself prudent and far-seeing, when it is only cowardly, craven, and contracted. It is against this that the missionary advocate has to contend, and his answer is supplied here.

I. The first point which invites our consideration is the *nature of the missionary enterprise*. What is the work that the Church is called by its Lord to do?

Paul may instruct us here. At the close of his argument here he says, "Now, then, we are ambassadors for God." Ruskin, in that memorable pamphlet of his on "the construction of sheep-folds," varies the translation in a very suggestive manner. "Now, then," he says, "we are *in embassy* for Christ." The alteration is a slight and simple one, but extremely suggestive. An ambassador is a representative of one potentate at the court of another, and his business may not involve anything more than a general expression of good will. But to be *in embassy* is to have a special and distinct message to deliver. We (and if that "we" primarily refers to himself and his brother apostles, it includes also all those who, having succeeded to the heritage of their faith, have accepted also its solemn responsibilities) are *in embassy* for Christ. That is, it is not a general commission of benevolent service to humanity as the highest service which we can render to God that has been entrusted to us, but a special message of love which the Father has sent to His wandering children. It is thus expressed by the apostle: "We beseech you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." Or, as he puts it before this same Corinthian Church in another form: "I make known unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand, by which also ye are saved." That gospel was the good news: "how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was

buried, and that He hath been raised." It was published in even more direct and touching appeal in that missionary sermon at Antioch in Pisidia: "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you forgiveness of sins."

This is the work which has been laid upon the Church. The one business of the missionary is to publish the gospel of forgiveness. If that be the message of infinite love to the world, there is the noblest of all services awaiting us, and there is the mightiest of all motives constraining us to undertake it. If there be any doubt in relation to it, if we are not quite sure whether this be the gospel or whether it is only one of the many counsels of perfection addressed to men, we are left alike without the truth for which the world is waiting, and without inspiration to preach it. They only can feel the constraint of the love of Christ who trust Him as the Saviour, and they only have that trust who understand something of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and so have learned also the cost at which they have been redeemed.

The grand essential of missionary work, therefore, is a strong faith. It is the first Christian enterprise to suffer from a weakness of faith. The ordinary engagements of a Church may be maintained with an appearance at least of efficiency; the labours of philanthropy for the relief of suffering may still be abundant; the stern conflict for public righteousness may be waged with dauntless courage and unbending



resolution, even though faith be languishing, and the fire of love be little better than smouldering embers on a deserted hearth. Various influences may avail to sustain activity here long after the great truths of the gospel have become mere forms and names, and therefore after the missionary enterprise has been abandoned as a mere chimera.

There is need for plainness of speech on this point. Philanthropy is not religion. Where there is true godliness there must be philanthropy—wise, active, generous in its spirit, as stern in its resistance to wrong-doing and sin of every kind as it is pitiful to its victims. Even care for the souls of men cannot be accepted as an excuse for neglect to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to deliver the captive, and to open the prison door to them that are bound. Still less can a compassion for the Hindoo or the native of New Guinea be an apology for indifference to the sins and sorrows that have their homes in London slums. The argument against missionary work on this ground has been pressed to an undue extent, but the reply to it is not to be found in any depreciation of the obligation and the value of home service.

The advocate of missions who looks coldly on the great projects of social reform is injuring the work on which his heart is intent. But, while recognising this to the full, I still maintain that all this work is not *distinctively* Christian. Christians are untrue to their Lord if they shrink from it; but there are

numbers who undertake it who own no allegiance to Christ as Saviour and Prince. You and I, my Christian brother, are bound to do it, because our Lord has so taught us; but there are others who are intensely earnest in these labours for the well-being of men who pour open contempt upon all that we hold most sacred. With the Christian, sympathy with sorrow, righteous indignation against selfish oppression, readiness to help all who are in need are the fruits of religion; with others they may be put forward as substitutes for it. And the feelings which inspire so many outside our churches might conceivably influence those within, so that they might for a time be zealous for a number of these good works, even after the inspiring power of love to God in Christ had been lost.

But it is altogether different with missionary work. It makes incessant and urgent demands on faith, and where faith is feeble it will certainly decline. It is not the least of the arguments on its behalf that it acts thus as a test of Christian character. It is emphatically true of our missionary work that we walk by faith, not by sight. Even in the most happy conditions the conversion of a heathen people is not to be accomplished in a day—is not to be expected without long waiting, many fluctuations in the rate of progress, great discouragements, possibly fiery persecutions. Such enterprises are ventures of faith, and, looked at in the light of common sense, extremely unpromising ventures they appear. For our

missionary brethren, life is one continued agony of faith. And so with the churches at home. The strength of their faith will be the measure of their missionary zeal.

There are three points in particular in relation to which there must be certainty.

1. The first of these is the essential nature of sin. The work is one at once of enthusiasm for God and enthusiasm for humanity. Both imply an overwhelming sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. It is not a mere misfortune; it is not an occasional weakness; it is a rebellion of man against God, and a separation from Him. Man (as the Psalmist tells us) was made a little lower than God; but sin has dragged him down to the fellowship of devils. The work of the Church is to deliver the sinner from the power and curse of the sin.

It is only when they are dealing with questions of theology that men talk lightly of sin or propound optimist views of human nature. If we look to human law and its provisions for the repression of human passion and the punishment of human wickedness, we get an entirely different conception. Still more is this the case if our views of human nature are derived from the wisdom of the world as expressed in its proverbial philosophy. It is cynical in tone, suspicious in temper, keen in judgment. Its radical idea is that selfishness is the dominant principle in the nature, and its policy is shaped in accordance with this view. It inculcates universal distrust, in-

sists that every man has his price, resolves even virtue itself into a higher form of self-love.

The literature of the day gives us precisely the same view. Popular fiction, and especially that of the *fin de siècle* school—of writers who have given themselves up to a dissection of character and motive—opens to our view chambers of imagery in the human heart darker and more forbidding than any which the hardest theology has ever depicted. After studying some of the ghastly pictures with which it has made us familiar, we feel that new emphasis has been given to the declaration of Holy Writ, that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. It is only when the doctrine of redemption is under discussion that we learn how little there is in man which needs to be purified. It is then we hear that sin is only a passing weakness, a frailty of the nature which should excite pity rather than provoke condemnation, a taint in the blood which by some process of evolution will ultimately be expelled. It is in his relations to God only that the sinner becomes an object of compassion as the product of heredity, the slave of an environment he did not create, the victim of circumstances from which he cannot escape.

If this were really so, then Christianity would have no message for the world. Its fundamental conception is that at the root of all the suffering and sorrow of men is the estrangement of the heart from God; and that while that continues there must be a steady deterioration of character, and with it a descent

into ever lower depths of corruption and misery. If human life anywhere answers to the poetic description, and is (as we know that in millions of cases it is) a hell, sin has made it so. Sin has built the prison of the soul, sin has prepared all its torture and anguish, sin is its darkness, its misery, its despair. The message of the Church is that Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.

2. The second point is the authority of the Bible, in which this message is found. It is quite true that those to whom Paul preached, and who through his preaching were turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, had no New Testament, and numbers of them had no knowledge of the Old. But our position is different from his in this respect. Paul had received a revelation direct from heaven, and testified of the things which he himself had seen. We have the record, and it is to us of vital moment that the record be true. It is useless to discuss whether it is possible for a man to cast away the record and yet retain his faith in the Christ because of the witness he has in himself. As a matter of fact—and facts are what chiefly concern us—our message and the authority on which we preach it are both derived from the Word of God. Faith in the Bible—not, indeed, in any human theory of inspiration, but in the Bible as rightfully entitled to this august name, the Word of God—because in it, and in it alone, is the message of the Infinite Love, the one gospel of salvation—is at the very heart of our work.

As we have recently been reminded by the Chairman of the Congregational Union, the critics must themselves submit to be criticised. There is no disposition to fetter their liberty, to undervalue their work, or even to reject their teachings when they are themselves agreed as to the facts, and have sufficient evidence to support their conclusions. But we have a right to complain that they are too negative, and at the same time too positive in their negation. The world is waiting, and reasonably asking, for something of a more positive character. It has been abundantly (many are inclined to think even too abundantly) instructed as to the errors which have to be renounced. What it wants to learn is the truth which is still to be held fast. It is interesting to learn that there is still passionate loyalty to Christ, though many ideas in relation to the Bible, once held so sacred as to be outside the region of controversy for Christian men, have been renounced. But it would be more interesting and more edifying still if we had a clear exposition of the new basis of faith. For numbers this change of view means the weakening if not the entire loss of the old foundation; what they eagerly ask is, Where is the new one found?

There is surely nothing unreasonable in such a demand. We have heard very much of the human element in the Bible, and it was probably necessary that we should. The mechanical idea of inspiration has worked much mischief, and the Bible will never wield its rightful power until men understand that its



writers were not mere pens, but men with their own individuality. But the reaction against this is in danger of carrying us too far. We have the treasure in earthen vessels, but of late so much care and attention have been bestowed upon these vessels that there is danger of forgetting the heavenly treasure.

In the love of tolerance and the desire to deal considerately and graciously as well as justly with all the varieties of opinions, there is reason to fear lest the exclusive claims of this Book to be alone the Word of God should be overlooked. Friends of Christian missions would of all men be the most inexcusable if they yielded to such influence, since from every part of the mission-field come innumerable and unbroken testimonies that the old power is living to-day, that everywhere it is, as Coleridge said, the Book which *finds* men at the very depths of their being and which thus proves itself the Word of God.

3. The third point is as to the Christ whom we serve, in whom we have believed, whom we preach. It is one of the best features in the theology and religion of our times that everywhere there is a clearer appreciation that Christianity is Christ. We go to the world not as the champions of a doctrinal system—still less as the representatives of a human organisation which we are desirous to extend—but as the servants of the living Christ. But, that being so, it is the more incumbent on us that our testimony of Christ be clear, distinct, unmistakable. To-day His name is on the lips of multitudes who seem to have a



very dim and uncertain idea as to who He is and what their relations to Him are. With many that name seems to be little more than a watchword of a party; with others it is but a veneering which is to add a certain dignity and authority to dreams and fancies of their own. It is not enough, then, that men should acclaim, even with enthusiasm and fervour, the name of Christ. The question which is naturally asked, and which ought to be asked, is, Who is this Christ? You emblazon His name on your standards; you proclaim Him your Leader and Captain. Who is He? To that question we, at all events, are bound to return an answer about which there can be no mistake.

Who, then, is Christ? In the Babel of voices which repeat the name on every side there are many discordant notes. It might almost seem as though there were numbers who, like the old Galileans, would take Him by force and make Him a king. His name is often heard from lips which have really nothing to tell about Him. They may be eloquent, but it is the eloquence of mysticism, dreamy, visionary, and without help for human spirits; and in its high-sounding phrases I listen vainly in the hope of catching the one note for which I am waiting, the one word which stirs my soul, which makes its pulses throb as with a new life. Poetic phrases may be set to sweet music, and yet amid all their melodies there may not be that note of redeeming love which alone can speak peace to the troubled conscience. Many names, indeed,

belong to Him : Teacher, Leader, Captain of Salvation, Comrade, Brother, Friend—all are His.

“Join all the glorious names  
Of wisdom, love, and power,  
That angels ever knew,  
That mortals ever bore—  
All are too mean to speak His worth,  
Too mean to set Immanuel forth.”

Wisest of Teachers, humbly would I sit at Thy feet, and learn from Thee the words of eternal life ! Mighty Leader, great Captain of salvation, from whom shall I receive strength and courage but from Thee ? Thou alone canst teach my hands to fight and my fingers to war, Thou makest me more than a conqueror because Thou hast loved me. Comrade—yes, ever loving, ever helpful, ever inspiring ; where is there fellowship like Thine ? Friend above all friends, the “Friend that sticketh closer than a brother,” what need I more ?

But if this is all I know I have only begun to learn about Him. I know that He is indeed the wisest of the wise, the tenderest of the tender, the most gracious of all who ever consoled human hearts. But still I wait to hear the Name which is above every name, the Name which gives reality, sweetness, and power to all the rest. Saviour, it is Thou who hast died that we may live. Thou art the Christ, the Saviour of the world. Every other melody fails to set forth Thy true glory, until I hear that anthem, loud as the voice of many thunders, but gentle as the

music of the spheres: "Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain, to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Christ, the Saviour of all men, is our message to the world, and it is the voice of faith alone that can proclaim it.

II. *The spirit in which the missionary work is to be done.*

The two forces which the words of the apostle suggest are those of enthusiasm and common sense. They are generally supposed to be irreconcilable. The world, of course, idolises the latter, distrusts the former. If there be a quality which is valued by practical men above all others—which, in truth, they are disposed to deify—it is common sense. Philosophy they contemplate from a distance, and hardly with admiration. Emotion is a kind of force about which they are extremely doubtful; sympathy is altogether too unselfish and too gushing, and philanthropy is visionary. They are, according to their boast, the children of common sense, guarded from all excited feeling and rash action by what they have learned to describe as sweet reasonableness. Their chief business is to restrain the too exuberant zeal of more ardent spirits, and it must be confessed they play their parts to perfection. The sweep of impetuous daring must be vehement indeed if they are not able to check it. At least, whatever the exercise of a timid caution, the most exaggerated estimate of difficulties, the most confident prediction of failure can do to chill

the fervour of souls too progressive and too daring will not be wanting. They have their use, these sober-minded men ; they may have their good qualities, but they have their defects. They have so accustomed their minds to arithmetic that they cannot get outside its very narrow confines. They can reckon all the "chariots and horses" on the field, but the mightier spiritual forces they cannot number, because they do not understand them. Even the lessons of the ages are lost upon them, and in face of the innumerable proofs that the race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong, they go on repeating their well-worn platitudes, and indulging their pleasant assurance that wisdom dwells with them, and that enthusiasts are dreamers who are wasting the force which they would utilise.

Yet these are not the men who make history : the men who are so afraid of doing foolish things that they lack spirit and courage to attempt wise ones ; who are so intent on seeing the way clearly before them that they fear to venture the first steps until they can see each successive one, say, up to the thirteenth ; with whom prudence is not only the primary virtue, but is the fulfilling of the whole law. Where they have a preponderance all things continue as they have been from the beginning. It is never theirs, cannot be theirs, to speak in the voice of faith and authority, "Who art thou, O great mountain ? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." When the challenge has been given they may do good service by

helping on the work with judicious counsel and strong hand. But the inspiration to do it must come from men of a very different type. A strong remark reported to me recently may serve to illustrate my point. It was made in reply to an observation relative to an enthusiast who was bulking somewhat largely and somewhat eccentrically in the popular eye, that there was in him a vein of insanity. "Ah!" was the answer, "a man must be mad if he is to get a hearing or do anything nowadays." The "nowadays" is suggestive. We are always ready to fancy that there is something new and peculiar "nowadays." But while it is so nowadays, so it has been from the beginning. Great leaders of thought, noble workers for Christ, have always been voted madmen. But it does not therefore follow that every fanatic is to be accepted at his own valuation, or even that every true enthusiast is to be regarded as infallible. "Believe not every spirit," and the faculty by which they have to be tried is sanctified common sense. It is thus that the two are to be blended. By all means let us be like Paul, beside ourselves to God; but the way in which we shall prove that ours is the inspiration of heaven will be by wise labour for the service of men—sober for your cause.

Let this principle be applied to our missionary work, and in doing it perhaps I cannot do better than use an illustration from the outside region of history. We have recently been invited to contemplate anew one of the most pathetic episodes in the story of

Europe. The Church of Rome has been moved, in this nineteenth century, to make an act of reparation to one of the most cruelly wronged of her numberless victims. The story of the Maid of Orleans reflects no credit on any party, hardly on any individual except herself. England forgot her chivalry when she stooped to avenge herself by unworthy arts and false accusations of the poor maid who had baffled her mightiest captains and wrested from her the fruits of her proudest victories. The king of France displayed basest ingratitude when he suffered her to whom he owed the recovery of his throne to be burnt for a witchcraft which he, of all men, knew to be nothing more than the inspiration of a lofty patriotism and a loyalty of which he was the undeserving object. But of all the actors in that ghastly tragedy none was more discredited than the Church of Rome, which now, after long centuries, hails the sufferer as a saint.

Joan of Arc was simply one of the enthusiasts of history, and there have been few in whom enthusiasm has counted for more. If she, an unknown peasant, became the deliverer of her people from a foreign yoke, it was by enthusiasm. Her promise to the disheartened king—that she would change the current of his life and lift him from poverty and degradation to the throne of his fathers—was laughed to scorn—could be nothing else. But the impossible was achieved by the contagion of her own enthusiasm. Other force she had not—no money, no troops, no



military genius. But she accomplished what was impossible to them all by the intense fire of an enthusiasm due to her belief in her Divine mission.

But mark the other side, in which is the point I desire to emphasise. It is all the more remarkable because her enthusiasm had in it more than a suspicion of fanaticism. She had the faith of a saint, and was lifted up by the lofty ideal of a true patriotism ever kept before her mind. It was this which she was able to breathe into a soldiery cowed and discouraged by incessant defeats, and by it she was victorious. It was tempered, however, by common sense. Her request for soldiers with whom to raise the siege of Orleans, beleaguered by the English forces, called forth surprise from those who fancied that her enthusiasm was a fanaticism which expected God to work a miracle through her. A Dominican monk, one of her opponents, objected to her: "Thou sayest that God wishes to deliver the people of France; if such be His will He has no need of men-at-arms." "Ah, my God!" was her reply, "the men-at-arms will fight, and God will give the victory." She went even further when answering an angry Professor, who said, "God wills us not to have faith in thy words, except thou showest a sign." "I have not come to Poitiers," she replied, "to show signs or work miracles; my sign will be the raising of the siege of Orleans." That was indeed a daring venture of faith, one which may well rebuke many a Christian, but it was justified by the event. There is, deny it



who can, a mighty force in this enthusiasm, when even rude soldiers can by it be roused from the very depths of apathy and despair into a courage in which is confidence, a confidence in which is strength, a strength in which is victory.

Here is really a parable of our great missionary work, with this one, but very marked difference, that ours is a spiritual undertaking, in relation to which we have the commission and the promise of God. To those who do not believe in its Divine nature and obligation nothing could well be more wild and desperate. To believers in the Spirit of God nothing is more wise or more assured of success. But the enthusiasm which faith inspires must be incarnate in strong deeds which sound wisdom shapes. And its justification will be the result. God will give us signs—the sign will be the conversion of men.

Let us note, in general, how these two work together, natural antagonists, perhaps, yet graciously blended in a firm co-operation for a common end. Accept the idea that Christian workers are enthusiasts. On the first blush of their daring thought about the conversion of the world, common sense is disposed to shrug the shoulders or curl the lip, or if there be in it something of a more genial spirit, express a condescending pity for the victims of such illusions. Yet surely there is much to be said on their behalf. After we have listened for a time to one of those preternaturally wise advisers who find a supreme pleasure in administering a douche of icy

water to the ardour of more fervid spirits, it is very refreshing to come across a true enthusiast. We may feel that he is all too sanguine, and that some of his bright forecasts will probably be belied by the event, but our very knowledge of the difficulties and possible disappointments which lie before him only make us rejoice that there is in him an enthusiasm which will be the mightiest force to overcome them all. Be sure of this—whatever the enterprise upon which he has embarked, he will assuredly need all the spring of faith and earnestness he can command. We have cynics enough; let us thank God that there are enthusiasts who do not believe in the impossible.

There are some noble words of Ruskin's on this point. "Quixotism or Utopianism—this is another of the devil's pet words. Whenever you hear a man dissuading you from attempting to do well, on the ground that it is Utopian, beware of that man. Cast that word out of your dictionary altogether. There is no need for it. Things are either possible or impossible. If the thing is impossible, you need not trouble yourselves about it; if possible, try for it." He then introduces some illustrations. I must take my own. It is Utopian to hope that to Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord. It is Utopian to expect that the crooked things of the world shall be made straight, and the things that are wanting shall yet be numbered. It is Utopian to look on with confidence to a new heaven and a new earth in which shall dwell righteousness.

It is Utopian to hope that the Babel of earth's ten thousand discordant voices of selfishness and passion and pride shall be exchanged for the melody of love and peace, the anthem loud as the voice of many waters, but harmonious and sweet as the music of the sphere. "Hallelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." But, to return to Ruskin's words: "The Utopianism is not our business—the work is."

Enthusiasm cannot listen to practical wisdom when it attempts to deter it from a Divine service because it pronounces it Utopian. Its only answer to such a suggestion is, Away with the thought; it is from beneath, not from above; it is of the earth, earthy; it may be, even, that it is of the devil, devilish.

But, nevertheless, common sense has much to teach us. It cannot define what is possible to faith, but it has much to say as to the method in which our work is to be conducted. It is a very insufficient master; it is an invaluable servant. God has given to His Church diversities of gifts, and the consecration of them all is essential to success in this heavenly work. It is a solemn obligation that we serve Him with our best, and it needs wise thought in order that our work may be of the best. But, above all, it needs the most passionate fervour of the heart, and with this no tame and cowardly counsels must be allowed to interfere. It is necessary that we measure our forces, and use them to the best advantage. What we have to dread is lest we listen too readily to the selfish love of ease or fear of difficulties. If the extreme of enthusiasm

is unreasoning rashness, the extreme of prudence is timid and cowardly indolence. Let us beware at least lest we fall into the latter evil. Alas! for the Church if, amid the luxury of Capua, its children should lose any of that hardness which is to be endured by good soldiers of Jesus Christ. There are still frowning heights of Alps and Apennines to be climbed; there are still desperate conflicts of Cannae to be fought; and we shall be unequal to the task if we content ourselves with talking of the heroes of the past without ever seeking to emulate their valour and devotion.

Two incidents which came recently under my notice may serve to illustrate the contrast between the severely utilitarian conception of Christian work and the more lofty ideal of a simple believer whose heart was possessed by that faith and love in which is Christian enthusiasm. The first was the bequest of a millionaire to his Church. It was generous—not less than £30,000 to his trustees for the various funds of the Church, *except the Foreign Mission Fund*. What a significant and what a melancholy exception! What a contrast to the offering—the veritable “widow’s mite”—of a poor paralytic member of one of our churches in East London! Clapsed in her hand after her death was found a little packet, marked, “For the dear Lord’s work.” In it were a few shillings earned by this loving hand-maiden of Christ by knitting as she lay on her bed of weakness. It was her offering for the missionary work. Is it necessary to point the moral?

Carlyle, interpreting with his usual insight and force the meaning of the Reformation, speaks of it as a grand opportunity, a test of national character prepared by God Himself. "Protestant or not Protestant?" he says. "The question meant everywhere: 'Is there anything of nobleness in you, O nation, or is there nothing? Are there in this nation enough of heroic men to venture forward and to battle for God's Truth *versus* the Devil's Falsehood at the peril of life and more?' . . . Once risen into this Divine, white heat of temper, were it only for a season and not again, the nation is thenceforth considerable through all its remaining history. What immensities of dross and crypto-poisonous matter will it not burn out of itself in that high temperature in the course of a few years!" A very slight change of words would adapt this striking passage to our present condition. The opportunities for missionary service to-day are surely God's call to the churches of this country. Everywhere wide and effectual doors are being opened; from every side come the calls for new and extended service. Our society is said to be in difficulties. Its difficulties are the result of its success. They are God's calls and our opportunities. The question is, Is there in our churches this Divine white-heat temper? There is certainly much dross, much crypto-poisonous matter to be consumed; stiff conventionalism, individuality often tending to waywardness, hard-headed utilitarianism which never

knows a noble impulse; pride of intellect, social ambition, selfishness in a hundred varied forms. All these have to be burned up, and with them innumerable hesitations, haltings, uncertainty, and feebleness of purpose, cowardice posing as prudence. The Divine heat will consume them all. May the Lord kindle this fire, and keep it ever burning on the altar of our hearts!

*THE CROSS AND THE CROWN.*





## THE CROSS AND THE CROWN.

“He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied.”  
ISA. liii. 11.

THE critical questions which cluster round the text and the chapter in which it occurs are many, and are full of profound interest. But as it is not intended to base any argument upon the interpretation of the prophecy, they need not detain us. The words may, at least, be as suggestive for us as they were for the Ethiopian eunuch. The Church of Christ has found here a wonderful forecast of the “cross and passion” of its Divine Lord.

There is no reason why it should be pressed into the service of the great doctrine which is too well established by the whole teaching of the New Testament to require additional proof of this kind. But without forcing a single point, which is open to controversy, this wonderful passage has a lesson to teach which cannot be evaded. Centuries before the advent of the Son of God this picture of the “Man of Sorrows” was drawn. Tender, pitiful, majestic even in His humiliation, infinitely full of

pathos and impressiveness, the portrait of God's chosen servant had stood before the eyes of the Jews from generation to generation, as familiar to them as it is to us. But in all the ages there was none who could be regarded as the original, until the coming of Jesus of Nazareth. It is no commonplace portrait, for which we might find many originals in every age of the world's story. It is unique, and that not only in its general features, but even in its details. It describes the sorrow and suffering of the Saviour as accurately as though it were a record of the events, and there is no other life of tribulation in which even an approach to such a correspondence can be shown.

Whether this was a prediction, or whether it is a casual coincidence, it is not necessary to discuss here, beyond remarking that if the latter idea be accepted, there is here only an illustration of the facility with which those who are desirous at all costs to get rid of the supernatural in religion, will accept theories far more incredible than those which they reject. Here is a Hebrew prophet writing hundreds of years before, who tells the story of an event which has determined the faith of Christendom, and has exerted an influence on the religious life of the world that is not only without parallel, but without even one that comes near to a comparison. And this we are asked to believe is a mere thing of chance. It is easier far to believe that this holy man spake as inspired by the Holy Ghost thus to prepare the way

of the Lord. But we must not linger on the argument. I take the common idea of the Church and use it not for any purpose of theological controversy, but for practical teaching and spiritual meditation. How far the prophet himself realised the full meaning of his own words need not be determined. The words themselves, as events have interpreted them to us, alone will have our attention.

Here they are, charged with a solemn significance which compels thought. The chapter contains, in brief, the story of a world's redemption, and these words, "the travail of His soul," suggest the cost at which it was secured, while they are followed by the confident assurance that that suffering shall not, cannot be in vain. We are led here into the most sacred of all themes—beyond all the scenes of shame and suffering through which the Saviour passed—beyond the wild outbursts of human hate, and the ruthless brutality of its insults, its scoffings and its blasphemies—beyond the heart-breaking spectacle of the innocent victim at the bar—beyond those sights of unequalled pathos in the garden and on the cross—into the very heart of the sufferer. "The travail of His soul"—not the physical pain which He so meekly endured, not the languor, the weariness, the intense anguish, but the deeper woe of the soul—that which in the garden made Him sweat great drops as it were of blood—that which forced out the cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"—that which expressed itself in the sympathy which prompted His

gracious words, "Weep not for Me, daughters of Jerusalem," for even in that hour of His own bitter grief His heart was troubled for the judgment which awaited them. Well may we approach in reverence and look on in penitence and love.

I. Let us meditate on this mysterious theme, "the travail of His soul." It is a truism to say that there is no agony like the agony of the heart. A man may bear a considerable amount of physical pain with comparative calm so long as his mind is at rest. It is the sorrow of the soul which can break down even the strongest and most heroic. Take such sorrow as that of David during the revolt of Absalom. With tolerable equanimity he endured the suffering which the rapid development of the rebellion entailed upon him. Driven from his capital, deserted by many of his tried and trusted friends, forced into a painful and laborious wandering, his heart and courage did not fail. But when the victory was won, and won at the cost of the death of Absalom, grief for the ungrateful and rebellious son did what no personal humiliation and suffering had been able to accomplish. His weakness and his strength alike were manifest in his unwise but still intensely natural wail of anguish. The intense grief, which was the result of a passionate love, was honourable to him as a parent, but that blind love which had first made him weakly, not to say criminally indulgent to his son, now made him (as Joab with a brutal

frankness reminded him) forgetful of the heroism of his loyal servants. But it is this very quality which gives David the place he has in the thought of all who are capable of appreciating a great heart. We see many of its follies, leading on even to crimes, we feel how impossible it is to become apologists for many an incident in his story, and yet there is an attraction in him which his faults are unable to destroy. The struggles and sorrows, the apostasies and penitences, the sympathies and hopes of that great heart are laid bare to us, and have a strange charm. A man of another mould would not have uttered a solitary regret or wept a single tear for Absalom. The injured majesty of the monarch, the blighted affection of the father, would have stifled every other sentiment. But David could not thus forget all the love of years. All the waters of that son's unworthiness, his profligacy, his rebellion, could not quench his love, and he broke out in that wail which courtiers pronounced imprudent, which a rough soldier resented as ungrateful, but in which sympathetic hearts recognise a note of tenderness—a veritable cry of a generous nature for which they love him.

If this is to be regarded as an analogy to the “travail” of which I am to speak, it is miserably inadequate. But must it not be so with every analogy? There is no human heart whose story can do more than help to some very faint and distant understanding of the grief and sorrow which rent the heart of Him who bore the burden of our iniquity.

The wider the distance which separates us from any heart and the more difficult must it be for us to understand its workings. There is no common denominator by which souls of different calibre can give to each other some comparative idea of their respective feelings. The agony of remorse, such as was experienced by Bunyan, and has been felt by many a penitent sinner returning from the error of his ways, is so alien to the ideas of one who has never realised what sin is, that it appears to him unreal, fanatical, and it may be hypocritical. So the sympathy of an ardent and generous nature with the wrongs of the oppressed, his righteous indignation with injustice, and courageous defiance of its power, so far from touching with admiration the cold and selfish man of the world, who is living only for his own aggrandisement and pleasure, and does not feel that in this he is neglecting any duty or failing in the great purpose of his being, provoke rather ridicule and contempt. The great reformers, the self-sacrificing philanthropists, those whom the world honours when they are dead, were unappreciated, probably scorned when they were living. Luther, Wycliffe, Howard, Wilberforce are names of heroes to-day: when they lived they were names of fanatics or fools. Even now their heroism in its "true inwardness" is so little understood that those who have succeeded to their work have succeeded to the same heritage of ignorant reproach and selfish opposition which they had to face.



But if this applies to other men, how much more must it be true in relation to the Lord Jesus ! As we ascend upward in the scale of humanity, at every stage we part with a large number of intelligent and sympathising associates, until when we reach the plane on which are found those whose hearts are burdened with the thought of the world's enmity to God and filled with a passionate longing for the establishment of His kingdom of peace and righteousness, the number is pitifully small. But far, infinitely far above all these, is the Master Himself. With a sweep of vision which takes in at once all that is meant by sin, and the death which is its wages, with a hatred of it which plummet cannot fathom nor arithmetic calculate, with a love for its victims as tender in all its thought as it is minute in its remembrance of each individual, how far is it beyond the ken of human intellect or the sympathy of human heart ! Height, length, depth, breadth—each expresses a new aspect—are all alike beyond and above our understanding. It passeth knowledge. What, then, can the "travail of such a soul" be but a mystery—grand, impressive, soul-subduing, but beyond our power to penetrate.

For this phrase outlines the deepest, most trying, most characteristic experiences of His soul. There are two or three passages in the life of our Lord which we can only contemplate from a distance. The "carpenter's" house, where by His own example He is

teaching us the sanctity and dignity of labour; the temple where, as a child, He is confuting the men of earthly wisdom, or as a man is tearing away the mask from the conventionalisms and hypocrisies of the day; the lake side by which He is wandering with His disciples, and scattering pearls of heavenly wisdom and grace at every step; the house where He is distilling His love and sympathy, and giving a blessing richer than that which rested on the house of Obed-Edom when the ark was there—are all familiar. At times we feel as if we could breathe their atmosphere and feel their influence. But there are other scenes which we cannot thus realise. We stand in awe before the overpowering spectacle—so awful in its sublimity—so suggestive in its very mystery. There are depths we cannot fathom.

We gaze from afar upon that solemn and eminently suggestive passage of which the record tells—"Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." Who can penetrate into the unbroken solitude of those forty days and forty nights during which this "travail of soul" was endured, the battle for man's salvation fought out to its bitter end? A deep and overwhelming impression rests on our spirits as we seek to realise what that brief note which suggests so much may mean, but we fail to find words adequate to express our own ideas as we grope after the truths, and for the poor words we may find we have no sufficient interpretation. All that we can know is that in that dread season

the Captain of our salvation wrestled with all the agony of His mighty soul against the power of evil and won the victory for us.

Even more is this the case with that experience of His which is described as the "agony." The word seems to have got its full significance from that garden to which we refer so often and of which we know so little. "By Thine agony and bloody sweat" is the continually repeated phrase, taken from one of the most exquisite passages in any human liturgy. There is hardly so much soul-subduing tenderness and solemnity in the phrase which follows, "By Thy cross and passion," as in this. Through the humiliation and pain of the cross others have gone, but this is unique—the "agony and bloody sweat." The cross suggests the physical suffering, and it is on that a certain class of teachers are fond of dwelling. They exhaust ingenuity in their endeavours to help us to realise the torture inflicted and the pain endured. They lose sight of the fact that this was but the smallest part of the cost at which our redemption was secured. The "travail of soul" was the most bitter part of that trial through which the Lord passed for us. If we want to have even a faint perception of that, we must stand by in silent wonder and adoring faith as we see Him in the agony, in which He sweats great drops as it were of blood, or we must wait through those hours of protracted darkness and silence on the cross, to be broken at last only by that heart-rending cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

It is possible to conceive of some of the elements which entered into that woe without entering into any of the theological controversies which have gathered round even these sacred scenes. One thing at least is clear : to Him was present, in a way and to an extent which was possible to none besides, all that was included in the wreck which sin has wrought. He saw all the possibilities of man's nature as man himself could never see them, and, on the other hand, He penetrated those depths of weakness, of guilt, of shame, of misery, into which sin had plunged him, as He alone could reach them. The Divine wave of pitying love which swept across His heart, itself filled Him with an anguish such as human heart has never pictured as possible. The recoil of His spotless spirit from the sin which has crossed the purposes of Divine wisdom and blighted the happiness by corrupting the purity of man ; the deep sense of all the degradation and curse which this meant for the victims ; the horror at the daring blasphemy with which the revolt against the Divine majesty and mercy was signalised ; the infinite compassion for the rebels which even this hatred of the sin could not abate, much less destroy, which in truth was even intensified and enlarged, made more tender and more gracious by it ; the yearnings of love for the recovery of the lost—all these entered into the " travail of the soul " which the Saviour endured. But when we have said all this, and when imagination, sanctified and quickened to the highest possible

degree, has endeavoured to picture all that is meant, how little can we know !

To a large extent the heart of every man is a *terra incognita* to all his brethren. Even his most intimate companions and friends do not understand it. "Every heart knoweth its own bitterness, and with its joy doth not a stranger intermeddle." A man's heart is not understood even by himself—it is as a sealed book to others. It would be worse than presumption, then, for us to suppose that we can read the heart of Christ—the one heart into which was gathered the deep, full sympathy of Divine love for the sinner. Here we have the very hate of hate in the passion against sin. Here we have the love of love in the pity for sinners. There we must leave it, conscious that at best we are but children picking up pebbles on the shores of a boundless sea, that in speaking we are but babblers, playing with the first notes of the theme of themes. Beyond us, above us, far deeper than the reach of our poor plummet, lies this subject, "the travail of His soul."

Is this travail an experience of the past? Did the agony cease and cease for ever when the last cry, "It is finished," was uttered on the cross? So we are too prone to think. But as the heart of Christ cannot change, there is surely a sense in which He still agonises for man. Even though we shrink, and probably shrink rightly, from using the phrases which belong to His earthly humiliation, yet it is not to be

supposed that when He passed into the heavens He laid aside any of that Divine sympathy which made Him take upon Himself the form of a servant and condescend to death. There is still the same longing for the recovery of man, the same hatred of the sin which has enslaved him, the same sorrow over the separation of the wandering child from the Father who loves him and seeks after him, despite all his unworthiness and ingratitude. It is only to think of what man is, to remember that he is as dear to the gracious Master as when He came to earth on His mission of love, to understand that the end is not yet. The old scene returns no more, but the result is not accomplished. Through the dark and terrible night of suffering He has passed once for all, but the love which inspired the sacrifice and sustained Him through it still regards with infinite compassion the race for whom it was undertaken, and waits for the rich reward—"He shall see of the travail of His soul."

II. Contemplate the fruit of this suffering. No words that were ever penned have opened such a future for the world as these. Over the stormy clouds of passion and of sin, charged with elements of destruction, and indeed so thick in darkness as to shut out the prospect of any brighter day, stretches this bright rainbow of promise. Think what it means. On the one side is the sacrifice of the Son of God. "Behold, and see, all ye that pass by, was there ever sorrow like unto this sorrow wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Him?" "A man of sorrows, who made His



acquaintance with grief." "Despised and rejected of men." These are some of the brief phrases which are burdened with that tale of humiliation and grief which they seek in vain to represent to us. We search for our illustrations everywhere, but as they are summoned one by one, they have simply to confess their inability to interpret to us this one phrase, "the travail of His soul." And then, on the other, is the assurance, "He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied." The only standard by which to estimate the riches of His love is that supplied by the suffering which it nerved Him to bear. What will, what can meet the yearnings of such love? That love strengthened Him to bear not only the contradiction of sinners, but the contact with sin. With all the instinctive loathing which He felt for sin, love made Him content to be numbered with the transgressors as though He were partaker of their wickedness. The cup was one of exceeding bitterness, for not an element which could add to its repulsiveness was wanting, but love caused Him to drain it to its very dregs. And now what can satisfy the yearnings of that Love? The sorrow was all for the redemption of man. How can it be satisfied except that work be accomplished?

It is not accomplished, and He is not satisfied. For as yet we see not all things put under Him. But while feeling this, and if we are in true sympathy with Him,



feeling it with deep sorrow and humiliation, let us never speak as though hitherto the gospel had been a failure. It could not be that through all the centuries the witness to the love of God should all have been in vain. True, alas ! that millions on millions have never heard the words of that life which He, by the travail of His soul, came to bestow. True, too, that even in those who have heard and believed, that life is very imperfectly developed. True, that the world on which Christ lavished the wealth of His love presents to-day a melancholy spectacle of unbelief—ungodliness and triumphant violence in high places, grovelling vice in its humbler and more obscure homes—selfishness, meanness, baseness everywhere. Angels might weep as their eye passed from land to land to think that this is the world for which He endured the cross, despising the shame.

But this spectacle, from which, however, we dare not turn aside, must not be allowed so to fill the whole field of our vision as to hide from us the work that has been done. After all the world is not what it was. Man is what he was—the same from age to age, ever carrying within him an evil heart of unbelief, a heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked—and everywhere the work of renewal has to be done afresh in every separate case. But there are a multitude of forces working for truth, for righteousness, for the glory of God, for the elevation of man, for the sweeping away of old forms and institutions of evil—forces which were unknown until Christ breathed

a new spirit into human hearts, and set a new ideal of character before men. That has been and is still a mighty influence, which has changed the atmosphere to an extent which those who are profiting by the change often fail to appreciate. All this has to be recognised when we try to compute the effect of that marvellous exhibition of love and self-sacrifice which our text so briefly but so pregnantly records. The glowing dreams of human brotherhood, and all that it is destined to accomplish for humanity, could never have been dreamed had not He lived who willingly accepted the burden of human sorrows, whose ministry was inspired by an unalloyed sympathy, who made Himself the brother of those who were sunk in depravity and sin, and who, by the grief which bowed Him down, taught us that the path to true greatness lies through self-sacrifice. It is sad to find men to-day who have not a pure and lofty idea which has not been borrowed from Christ, and from that very part of the life and work of Christ which they have been accustomed to treat with least regard, which indeed they have wholly failed to understand, sneering at what they term metaphysical dogmas. They will talk largely of Christ's example, but the spiritual truth contained in the agony and death is put aside. Yet everything comes from it. All that is really worthy of admiration in that philanthropy of the day which is putting itself forward as a substitute, not for the Christianity of the churches, as they would represent it, but really for the Chris-

tianity of Christ Himself, springs from the revelation of His love in His suffering unto death. It is He who has taught, not by word only, but by the whole of His life, and most of all by its closing scenes of apparent failure but of real victory, that the true man is he who comes to be the servant of all. The doctrine of brotherhood would have been preached in vain—might it not rather be said would never have been preached at all?—had not our Elder Brother travailed in birth for His brethren, dead in trespasses and sins, that to them might come the blessedness of the new life of holiness in God. The endeavours of men to force some ideas of their own into the place of the Divine message which comes from Gethsemane and Calvary are but futile attempts to get rid of the offence of the cross.

Altruism is one of the cant phrases of the day. We are all learning to be altruists, in talk if in nothing more. The word is a new coinage, and those who use it may fancy that the idea which it expresses is new also. But what is there strange in it? In a conversation in which I joined lately, the question was started, What other word will express the same thought? “Unselfishness” was suggested, but the objection was that it might be a purely negative quality, and that, in fact, many obtain credit for the virtue simply because of an amiable temper, too sluggish to be ambitious and too gentle to be unkind, but destitute of force and incapable either of arduous toil,

generous sacrifice, or chivalrous devotion. At length the question was asked, In what does Altruism differ from Love? Well, in what? "Love" is the old Christian word sanctified by New Testament usage, expressive of all that filled the heart of Christ, the perfect revelation of His Law. Altruism is a philosophic or philanthropic term which, by its very novelty, suggests an independence of that mighty force which under the name of Love has been travelling down through the centuries, conquering and to conquer. But what is the difference? "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." "God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." What conception has Altruism higher, wider, deeper than this? What lesson of self-sacrifice has it to teach which is not found here? How would it have learned this if it had not been set forth by the Lord? The power it has in the world to-day is derived from the influence of His Cross.

There is a powerful—some would say a weird-like—fascination in the study of what, for lack of a better term, I will call the natural history of religions and of the religious life. Every new theory has its attraction, and the newer and more extreme it is, the greater its charm. There is nothing of which numbers seem so afraid to-day as of seeming to be content with the old truth, which has nourished the noblest souls of men for centuries, which was the inspiration and life of the primitive Church, and in

which alone is our strength and confidence to-day. We shudder at the thought of being regarded as old-fashioned. Alas! for us, indeed, if we had learned nothing from the teaching of the ages and from all the light which has come to us in these modern days. But is there no danger in the idolatry of all that is new? In the eagerness with which it is sought to express theological ideas in the language of the New Science, is there no fear of forgetting that the truths of the gospel have an independent foundation? An endeavour is being made to-day to trace the Evolution of Love. It is as unsatisfactory as it certainly is unnecessary. The perfect beauty of Love is revealed to us in the Lord Jesus Christ and nowhere else. Men are beginning to see something of its beauty, and straightway many are disposed to forget whence it came, and to indulge a fancy that it is the product of the marvellous nineteenth century.

Are we to encourage them in this vain delusion even by a suggestion that out of some natural instincts this wondrous grace has been developed? There is in it infinitely more than those parental feelings in which we are now taught to find the germs of that perfect love in which humanity finds its highest and noblest ideals. That love is not a child of earthly origin or human birth. It is the revelation of the heart of God manifest in the travail of the Redeemer's soul. Silently but mightily has that revelation been working as a leaven in the midst of the corrupt mass of humanity. The

deepening sense of the obligation of man to his brother, the growth of public opinion against a hard selfishness, the generous thought which is being more and more expressed every day in schemes for the relief of every form of human sorrow and suffering, the deep-seated rebellion against social injustice of every kind, and the discontent even with the inequalities which are inevitable—all testify to the presence and power of this leavening idea. I would I could believe that love was the inspiring principle in all the new movements which have for their professed end the help of the weak, the comfort of the sorrowful, and the amelioration of the lives of the poor. Be this as it may, the indirect influence of this great law of love is exhibited by numbers who do not confess Jesus Christ as their Lord. Nevertheless it was from Him and Him alone that the law came. It is in His life and death that it has its one perfect manifestation, and it will retain its power in the world so long, and so long only, as He is lifted up, and men are drawn to Him.

In estimating the more direct effect of the suffering of Christ it must never be forgotten that His love is a love for individual souls. The vastness of the great mass of human beings for whom He died does not weaken His sense of the value of each individual, or abate the intensity of the sympathy with which each individual is regarded. The thought is difficult for us to entertain, even as we find it difficult to reconcile



the Omnipresence of God with His nearness to every child of His great family. But it is not the less true. He who came to save a world stopped to talk with a solitary woman at the Well of Sychar, to call an inquiring publican at the entrance of Jericho, to speak the word of peace and forgiveness to one broken-hearted penitent. Hence in every renewed sinner He “sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied.” He has a preciousness in his Redeemer’s sight of which his friends and neighbours are little conscious. Such virtue is continually going forth from Him, and each of them is a new testimony to the power of His grace.

Were this all, Christ would not have suffered in vain. But when contrasted with the grandeur of His work how small does the result appear! True, in whatever light it be viewed, He has done more for the world than all other masters combined. But that is a small boast. To say that Jesus of Nazareth has been a greater blessing to the world than Mohammed or Buddha, or Confucius, is to say nothing. Comparisons of this kind only keep us from recognising the true conditions of the case. The central facts are these—the first that Christ agonised to save the world—the other that the world is not saved. What a small company at most are the redeemed of Christ after the lapse of all these centuries of work and prayer, of consecrated service and believing petition, of fearless confession and of courageous martyrdom! The zeal of apostles, the testimony of martyrs, the



heroism of missionaries who have preached Christ in the world, the loving devotion of multitudes continued from century to century, and spreading from continent to continent—is this all the result? Again, let it be said that the result is not to be depreciated or disparaged. Taken absolutely it may be large, but compared with the vast mass still unaffected, it is but small. Yet the promise stands. As yet we but have an earnest of its fulfilment. But if the end seems distant, and the progress slow, and the delay wearing and wearying, the word cannot be broken.

III. In these words the missionary enterprise of the Church finds at once its warrant, its inspiration, and its hope. The self-devotion of the Master supplies at once the example and the law for His servants. He gave Himself for us. Then we are not our own, but His to work out His Divine purpose, to catch His spirit of infinite love, to fill up, as Paul expresses it, that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ—in short, to be consecrated to the work in which He poured out His soul even unto death. The satisfaction of the Saviour is generally viewed in connection with the conversion of the unbelieving world. But this is to overlook what must be preliminary—the highest manifestation of the new life which He gives in those who are enrolled among His followers.

There is one point on which we can look not with complacency, but with gratitude and hope. The whole ideal of the Christian life has been rising.

The servants of Christ are coming to understand, as it has never been understood before, that a Church exists for the conversion of the world, and that in that work every one of its members is bound to take a part. The criticism upon the Evangelical religion of two generations ago is often too severe, and is strangely oblivious of the service which its representatives rendered to the cause of humanity. But it would be idle to deny that its tendency was to become too self-contained, that it lacked insight and breadth of sympathy, that its introspection was often extremely morbid and its zeal for orthodoxy apt to become a worship of the letter to the injury of the spirit. Last, but not least, that its reverence for respectability was such that it came dangerously near an idolatry of wealth and position. But if its offences were grievous, grievously has it answered them. Because of them many are tempted to forget its grand achievements in the sphere of Christian enterprise and philanthropic effort. It finds but little tolerance to-day for some even of its virtues; there is none for its conspicuous defects. To-day the true Christian spirit is more fully developed; a spirit of tenderness, of compassion for the weak and the lost, of entire consecration to the work of their salvation; a spirit of simple faith, and therefore of daring enterprise; a spirit out of which any pride of Pharisaism has been cast as being in itself the worst form of worldliness. If there be a special peril lurking in some of our modern developments, it

is lest the pity for the sinner should in any way weaken the sense of the exceeding sinfulness of his sin. But for this the one sure corrective is a closer and more devout contemplation of the travail of the Redeemer's soul. The sin which laid this burden on Him cannot be treated as a light thing. We cannot know that sin as He knew it; we cannot weep such tears of blood as those which He wept over it; but we can, in our measure, hate it, and that hatred will only give a more intense enthusiasm to our passionate longing to save our brethren from its curse. As we rise to this level the Master will see in us the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

But finally these words open up the brightest prospect of the destiny of the race. What will satisfy the longings of that heart which bore with meekness and resignation this tremendous load of anguish for the sake of man? There can be no prophecy of the world's future which can compare with this. He would be presumptuous indeed who would attempt to unfold all that is suggested by this transcendent word of love. How God will fulfil His own purpose, how the Name which was won in those hours of agony shall be raised above every name, how the mystery which still rests over the story of man is to dissolve in the glory of the latter day, I do not presume even to conjecture. Enough for me to know that He who was sent not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved, shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.



*THE FIRST MISSIONARY SOCIETY.*



## THE FIRST MISSIONARY SOCIETY.

“And as they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”—ACTS xiii. 2, 3.

THIS is the first recorded act of the first Christian Church. Till the gospel was preached at Antioch, and a new society gathered of men, many of whom had previously been heathens, the “disciples” or “brethren,” as they variously designated themselves, had not taken the name of Christians. Their enemies had sneered at them as Nazarenes, intending thus to brand them as an heretical sect of Jews; they were content to speak of themselves as learners in the school of their Master and helpers of one another. But when the new faith had broken loose from the narrow bands of Judaism, and in its first successes at Antioch had made it manifest that it was to be a world-wide power, the time had come for it to take the name under which it was to travel round the world and down the ages



to the end when Christ shall be Lord of all. It was necessary at this epoch for it to proclaim its central truth by adopting a title expressive of allegiance to its Lord, and proclaiming the Name to which every knee shall bow. So the disciples were called Christians, and the first Christian Church was formed.

No apostle preached the word which gathered its first members or organised this new body. The spontaneous and unconventional character of a procedure on which so much depended is its most remarkable feature. Here, at the beginning, is the conspicuous absence of any approach to form or routine. There is not a word to tell us who presided at the opening meeting. We have not even a hint as to how this name, so venerated and mighty now, came to be given; by whom—friend or foe—it was coined; how it so readily and immediately passed into use. What we do know is that this is the first Christian Church, and that here we have the first minute of its proceedings.

A very interesting and suggestive minute it is. Nothing, indeed, could supply a better index to the state of feeling in this infant society and to the conception its members had formed thus early of the aims of this religion which they had accepted, and of the part which they had to play in working them out. There is a suggestive contrast between their action and that of the Church at Jerusalem after the wonderful quickening of Pentecost. Among the converts of Peter and the other apostles, the one thought seems to have been

fellowship. They would edify one another, succour and help one another, strengthen each other in the joy of that salvation which they had found. But there is not a suggestion as to extension. So far as we gather from the record, the idea that they had been converted in order that they might convert the world, had not fired them with its ambitions or burdened them with its responsibilities. How different is it at Antioch! These Christians no sooner feel the blessedness of the new hopes awakened within them than they are fired with a holy passion to call others to share in their spiritual joy. The difference may be partly due to the diversity of their training. The Church at Jerusalem was composed of Jews with all their strong national prejudices, their belief that salvation is of the Jews, their inability to grasp the lofty conception of a world's conquest by the gospel. In Antioch were men of wider thought, who had learned from events passing around them, and by which they had been so largely affected themselves. Many of them were Gentiles—how could they doubt that the Word of God which had reached them would be made mighty to convert other Gentiles also? Then Paul was among them with his wondrous story of the way in which God had called him to be a messenger to the Gentiles, with his soul brooding over the high destiny which God had thus marked out for him, with his lips uttering the burning thoughts and desires which filled his heart, and so communicating something of his Divine enthusiasm to others, who,

though they had not his profound insight, shared his faith and hope. Hence the Church no sooner received its world-wide name, than it became possessed of a world-wide spirit. God had sent messengers to them—they must send messengers to regions yet beyond.

The record is eminently instructive. It sets forth the origin of the missionary or aggressive spirit of the Church. The thought did not suggest itself to them as an instinctive working of that new spirit with which they were endowed. There was here no spirit of proselytism, which, in truth, was a sentiment all but unknown. Nor were they moved by a mere sentiment of compassion for those who were in that darkness out of which they had themselves been led into the marvellous light of God's love. All this would have been natural enough, but there was something which went far beyond a noble impulse of their own hearts. There was a Divine call, and they followed the guidance of the Spirit of God.

“As they ministered unto the Lord, and fasted.” The brief record suggests a time of spiritual preparation. The young converts were throbbing with all the freshness and energy of a new life. Love to Christ was the ruling passion within them, and their one desire was to express it in deeds of consecrated service. As Paul's first cry in the experience of that solemn hour when his soul became filled with the longing and purpose to undo something of the evil which in the days of his ignorance he had wrought was, “Lord, what wilt

Thou have me to do?" so was it with them. They cried to their Lord to make known to them how they could best prove their devotion to Him and work out His own grand purposes for men. They had prepared no elaborate scheme of operation; they simply submitted themselves to Him.

It would be safe to say that the ministry which is thus indicated was not left to a few favoured spirits, who were assumed to be of peculiarly devout spirit and consecrated life. In the glow of their early zeal all Christians felt that they were called to be saints. The invidious and anti-christian distinction which marks out some for the higher life, while others are left to pursue a less saintly course, keeping on the dull level of a mere profession of godliness, in which there is little of living force, had not been introduced into the Church. Its members were all supposed to be moved by the same spirit and to live for the same ends. To forsake the Christian assembly was the first sign of a drawing back from the rugged way of salvation to the primrose path of perdition. It may be safely assumed, therefore, that it was the whole Church which gave itself to this sacred and solemn work of waiting upon God, that from Him might come the inspiration and the leading which would indicate their work and fit them for its discharge.

How the Lord made known His will it does not

concern us to inquire. There is no need, however, to suggest that a supernatural vision was granted, or that a voice from heaven was heard in answer to their prayers. Such a view gives a character to that age for which there is no sufficient evidence, and, by separating it so entirely from our own, hinders us from recognising those intimations of the Divine will which come to us as certainly as they came to the primitive Church. God does not address Himself to us in accents which our bodily ears can distinguish, but it is a pure assumption that He who revealed His will to the Church at Antioch thus seeking for His guidance will not as certainly inspire and lead us. It may, alas ! be only too true that we are too prone to rely upon our own wisdom, instead of seeking that which cometh from above ; that we estimate too lightly the power of prayer, and trust more to our own discussions about the wisdom of a particular line of action than to the supplications we offer at the throne of the heavenly grace ; that in our prayers we rather ask God to prosper us in following out our own counsels than commit our ways unreservedly to Him. If this be the feeling in our hearts, how can we hope to be led ? The handwriting may be on the walls sufficiently clear and distinct, but our minds are so blinded by our own thoughts, or ambitions, or prejudices, that we cannot discern that the finger of God is tracing it. But if with believing heart—willing to sacrifice our most cherished hopes and prejudices,

intent on knowing God's will and doing it, however it may cross our personal feeling or party attachment, and possibly compel us to make sacrifices which tax us heavily—we ask Him to lead us, then we may expect that He will as certainly answer us as He did that Church of Antioch. Some mighty impulse may stir us from lethargy, and constrain us to heroic daring and generous devotion. Some unexpected movements of thought and feeling may lead to unity of resolve and purpose as rare as it is full of encouragement and hope. Where there had been hesitation, uncertainty, exaggeration of difficulties, lack of zeal, there may suddenly be developed an earnestness, a resolution, and a courage which themselves reveal the working of the Divine Spirit. All this may be realised in our modern days. Why should we suppose there was more than this in this first awakening of the Church to its responsibility for the conversion of the world? Under the teaching of the Spirit of God they felt the first constraint of that Divine necessity by which the whole life of the Apostle to the Gentiles was inspired and elevated.

Let us seek to cast out of our minds those traditional conceptions which stand so much in the way of the right understanding of such a narrative as this. These people at Antioch in the first century were men and women like ourselves, differentiated only by the special circumstances of the age in which they lived and the training by which



they had been led into the fellowship of Christ. They must have had a freshness of impression which is all but impossible to us who have grown up in familiarity with truths which had come to them with all the power and glory of a new revelation. In addressing themselves to Christian work they were absolutely without the light of experience, and had to venture on new and hitherto untrodden paths. Preaching was a novelty, the mere call to belief was a novelty, the most startling novelty of all was the idea of a Jewish preacher going forth to convert the Gentile world. It is not to be doubted that in committing themselves to such a daring enterprise this Church exercised all their powers of forecast, deliberation, and judgment. We are not to conceive of them as mere machines, but as men of reason, with freedom of will and intelligence to guide them as to the resolutions which they should form. They were not mere children of impulse, but, on the other hand, they were not men of the world, to be governed by those purely selfish or worldly considerations which the world is accustomed to glorify under the name of common sense. They felt themselves to be servants of God, and sought to learn God's will that they might do it. In fellowship with one another and in prayer to Him the lesson was to be learned.

It requires no great, certainly no illegitimate, exercise of the imagination to conceive that in their ministry to the Lord was included a conference—what might in our days be described as a Church



meeting—for the purpose of comparing the different views as to what the will of the Lord was. There may have been a diversity of opinion, as there is pretty sure to be wherever independent minds have to form a judgment on some practical subject. It was not to be expected that, even in that first Church, every one would be fired with the glowing enthusiasm of Paul or show the self-sacrificing devotion of Barnabas. That unanimity was secured cannot be doubted, unless we are to assume that the signs of the Divine guidance were so questionable that even to the end there was hesitation and uncertainty in some minds. The impression conveyed in the narrative is the very opposite of this, and suggests that the action was that of the entire Church, not of a mere majority.

But there is nothing inconsistent with this view in the suggestion that before this point was reached there had been free, possibly prolonged, expression of opposite opinions, that the diverse views had been carefully sifted and examined on every side, that earnest prayer had been offered, and that in the gradual clearing away of difficulties, in the convergence of opinion, and finally in the inrush of a strong conviction by which all were moved, and which, in fact, filled the whole assembly with a passionate desire to make known to all men the salvation which Christ had wrought in and for them, the presence of the Holy Ghost was recognised. Would that we had a full record of that eventful Church meeting! How suggestive may

have been, probably were, its deliberations! It is not impossible, nay, is even probable, that they may have anticipated some of the discussions on Christian work which have extended down to our own time, and which are carried on eagerly still. The Church might pay a large price, and sacrifice even much of its theological lore—often not more curious and interesting than singularly unedifying in the formation of Christian character—if it could thus secure a minute record of the words of thought and wisdom that were spoken, and still more of the earnest prayers that were offered.

It seems natural that some would be anxious to confine their work, at least for a time, to Antioch itself. In that wealthy, luxurious, self-indulgent, vicious, and superstitious city there was surely a field more than wide enough for the absorption of all the energy which even the youthful enthusiasm of the Church was able to employ. Antioch was a typical Eastern city, and the corruption and impurity of the East were proverbial. The Roman satirists are especially severe upon Oriental vice, and never weary of painting, in dark and repulsive shades, the evils which resulted from the influence it was exerting upon the whole tone and character of Roman society. Antioch was one of the fountains from which issued that stream of corruption which, like a lava flood bursting from some volcanic mountain, spread death and destruction everywhere in its path. Its population

was given up to the pursuit of wealth and pleasure, and it would not be easy to point to any purifying influence which was at work among them. In the schools of philosophy were carried on those fruitless discussions which interested the subtle intellect, but did nothing to cleanse the heart or sanctify the life. Its religion was a mere superstition, which degraded instead of elevating, which left the conscience and the affections untouched, in which was no restraining power to curb appetite and lust, whose most sacred rites were often nothing better than orgies of vice. That sad picture, called up by the words of the Lord, had its counterpart there as in the homes of Paganism—everywhere “the light that was in them had become darkness, and great was that darkness.”

On every side the Christian burning with zeal had work to do, sufficient to draw out all the wealth of sympathy and to tax to the uttermost all the force and energy of his nature. Under the shadow of the outward show of magnificence and splendour were to be found poverty the most squalid, vice the most loathsome, misery the most abject and helpless. To minister to the thousands of sufferers, to cast even a ray of light upon hearts and lives over which brooded the shadows of a hopeless darkness, to bind up some of the wounds of the broken-hearted lying round them everywhere, might naturally seem to be the first work of the Church. Its members had learned a truth which to them had been as life from the dead. They had learned the Father's name and been taught to

look up into His face and to see there only the beaming of Infinite Love. They had heard the gospel, that the Son of God had come to suffer and to die, only that He might bring the sinful and wandering children back to their Father's home, and had thus seen something of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. They could not but testify of this grace, and here was the sphere in which the service should be rendered. It was wide enough, its need was beyond controversy, its claim upon them was surely paramount.

And yet they were called by the Holy Spirit to send forth their most conspicuous and gifted workers to the regions beyond. That they did not misinterpret the Divine will is proved by the result. There could be no better evidence that Paul and Barnabas obeyed a call from heaven than was supplied by the signal success which crowned their mission. Are we not entitled, then, to infer that here we have an indication of a Divine law in relation to the conversion of the world? It suggests that there is to be a continued pressing onward to new fields of labour, even though very much remains to be done in those in which the work has already been commenced. The Lord enjoined his servants to begin at Jerusalem, but events soon made it clear that it was no part of His design that they should remain at Jerusalem until all her sons were obedient to the faith. Even as the disciples had been sent forth with the command to go from town to town and village to village, so in

His closing words did He indicate that while Jerusalem was to be the starting-point of their work, it was to be a starting-place only—for the world was to be the sphere which they were to occupy. So now, as the seed had been sown in Antioch, it must be left to grow. The sowers could neither afford to wait for the full harvest, nor even to scatter seed over the whole field, but they must press on into wildernesses yet beyond, that some of their waste places might be reclaimed and made gardens of the Lord. The love of God was for the world, and it is His will that the whole world shall hear the good news of the salvation which His grace hath prepared for all men. Under whatever conditions it be prosecuted, that work cannot be carried to its consummation without a vast expenditure of Christian love, energy, and sacrifice. But it would be absolutely hopeless if the Church paused at each successive stage, till one nation had been entirely converted before passing on to another. Had the Church of Antioch hesitated at this juncture, how long would it have been before Asia had received the Word of God? Had Paul turned a deaf ear to the appeal from the man of Macedonia, how long might Europe have waited before it heard the voice of the heralds proclaiming the gospel of peace?

There are so many of the tenderest and best sentiments of the heart arrayed in opposition to this view of Christian obligation that it is necessary to urge still further that the course of action which these first

Christians pursued is the only one that is consistent with the idea of the gospel itself. It is a religion for the world, and anything which tends to give it a local or national character not only narrows it, but forgets its primary design. There may appear to be something beautiful and attractive in linking patriotic sentiment on to Christian faith, but there is danger in such association. "If any man love father or mother, or brother or sister, more than Me, he is not worthy of Me." Is not that the principle which applies here? It is a right and noble thing to love our country as it is to love our kindred, but if our patriotism cause us to forget that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of all men, and that the uttermost parts of the earth are to be His possession, we are putting our country before our Lord, and are showing how little we have of that spirit which led Him to give His life for the redemption of the world. There is really no occasion for setting up this antagonism between sentiments, each of which has its own place to fill in stimulating to Christian consecration. Patriot more intense in devotion to his nation, more susceptible to the influence of all its glorious traditions, more intent on winning his kinsmen for Christ than Paul there could not be. It would not be possible to surpass, not easy even to reach, the magnanimous nobility of spirit shown in the outburst of his passionate desire for the salvation of the people who were following him with cruellest hate. "I could wish myself anathema of Christ for my



brethren's sake, my kindred according to the flesh." Even as his only retort (if a word conveying any suggestion of resentment can be applied to it) to Agrippa was, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all those that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds," so his one answer to the cruel persecutions of his own countrymen was the expression of an intense passion for their conversion, coupled with the suggestion that, like himself in his unregenerate days, they were sinning ignorantly through unbelief—"I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." Yet this Hebrew of Hebrews was the Apostle of the Gentiles, as broad in his conceptions of his work as he was catholic in his sympathies, confessing himself a debtor both to Greek and barbarian, becoming all things to all men, glorying in the thought that in Christ Jesus there can be neither Jew nor Greek, but all are one in Him.

It is in the spirit of Paul, whose influence it is not difficult to trace in this action of the Church at Antioch, that the work of the gospel has to be done to-day. The argument against Foreign Missions, urged by many well-meaning men, that the spiritual needs of England are so great that the Church should spend all her resources at home, may seem at first conclusive, but it is essentially fallacious. Plausible as it sounds, it involves an untenable conception of



Christianity itself. Whatever tends to reduce it to the level of a local or national religion goes far towards making it absolutely incredible. That God loved this little world—a mere speck in the universe of being—is a sufficiently marvellous fact, but if for the world be substituted the English race, the wonder becomes so great as to defy belief. True, the love to the nation or to the individual is not less real and direct because it extends to the whole family of man. It is the exclusiveness only that is incredible. “He hath made of one blood all the nations upon earth,” “all souls are His”—and the message which reveals the secret of His heart is charged with infinite love to all mankind.

But it is not so much a question for argument. The principles will be admitted by numbers who shrink from their full application. Work at home has all the charm which belongs to a conflict which interests and excites, all the authority which springs from a sense of urgent duty, all the sweet sanctity which hovers round the objects of our personal knowledge and affection—must it not be added all the attraction which belongs to work which we can watch for ourselves, and to whose success we feel we have contributed? The service to be done for God in our land to-day is so urgent, so imperative, so fascinating, that it is not surprising that it should so possess the minds of many as to leave little room for thought about the outlying world. There must, too, necessarily be a division of labour. Some are apologists,

some are soldiers of righteousness, some are workers in slums, some are carrying out grand projects of social or political reform. All are needed, and each should honour the other, though his service may not have any special charms for himself. But these hardly touch the great crusade of holiness to which the Church is called. The world is to be converted, and in that service the sympathies, the efforts, and the prayers of all should be engaged. It is not a fact that the churches have not the resources sufficient for the work. It is not the lack of resource which we have to deplore, but the lack of consecration only.

Were we to institute a contrast, indeed, it would be easy to find many features in our own position which would serve to enhance our obligation as compared with those which rested on the first Christian Church. They must have been but a poor and feeble folk, these young converts, gathered as usual in those early days from the humbler classes of society: And yet they undertook this grand work, encompassed as it was with difficulties. Had they shrunk from it, and had the other churches of that time followed their example, where would have been the Christianity of England? There is a mode of looking at our duty to-day underlying which is a quiet assumption that the gospel is, in some sense, a specially English possession which we may share with or withhold from others at our pleasure. This may not be avowed, but it is really implied in the excuses with which appeals for missionary service are continually

met. Happily for us, happily for the world, and certainly happily for themselves, these Christians had not so learned Christ, and did not so understand the commission given to His Church. It would have been much more excusable in them than in us whom the ages have instructed. They had much to learn themselves, and might have pleaded the necessity for a fuller study of Christ, for a careful discipline of their own society, for a trial of their strength, before they undertook the work of converting others. They might have urged that in such consolidation of their own force lay their best hope of doing efficient service in the outlying regions of Pagandom. But to have reasoned thus would have been to take counsel with flesh and blood, and these men were under the power of a Divine influence. They became the pioneers in the work of the world's salvation, because they heard and obeyed the call of God.

Here, then, is a Church which at the very beginning of its career realised the true ideal of Church life. To-day we have all kinds of theories as to the tests by which a Church is to be proved and its genuineness judged. The theologian insists that it must satisfy the requirements of the most rigid orthodoxy, and is much more concerned about the correctness of its creed than the evidence of its living power in the conduct of its professors. To him it must seem strange that there is not a solitary allusion to doctrine here. This young society

had very much to learn, and yet it did not resolve itself into a company of devout students, but obeyed the Diviner impulse which stirred it to become a society of saviours. Of course it had its creed, though no attempt was made to formulate it, and though it was, in fact, the simplest belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. But that was sufficient for everything. They were so full of Christ and His love, and they realised so thoroughly that its messages of peace were for all men, that they were fired with that passion for saving souls which is at the root of all missionary enterprise. Like the lepers who found themselves in the midst of the plenty of a camp deserted by the panic-stricken soldiers, while their brethren were starving in the city, they felt that in the day of good things which had come to them they could not hold their peace. The surest proof of their faith in Christ was their readiness to obey His great command: "Go ye, and make disciples of all the nations."

How is it that the same spirit of aggression, of stern conflict with evil, of zeal to preach everywhere the unsearchable riches of Christ, is not as manifest to-day as it was in the first days of the Church? Far be it from me to bring any wholesale accusations—undiscriminating in their application and extravagant in their censures. It is worse than folly, it is injustice of so serious a kind as almost to involve treason to the interests of the truth, to depreciate the zeal and self-devotion of numbers of Christian men and women

around us. But while gratefully recognising all these signs of life and progress, this surely must be admitted, that, if all the churches of to-day were possessed with the same passion which moved this Church at Antioch, there would be developed a power on behalf of Christ and His gospel which would speedily work a revolution that would silence unbelief by the very grandeur of its achievements.

Is it that familiarity with the truth has in any way weakened its force? A striking and painfully suggestive remark was recently made to me by a missionary as to the difference between prayer-meetings as he had seen them in England since his return, and those to which he had been accustomed among the members of native churches in China. His experience, too, he said, was not exceptional, but was common to his brother missionaries. The warmth, the passionate emotion, the intense earnestness, and the urgent importunity of the prayers of the converts from heathenism stood out in strange contrast to the all too decorous propriety, often going to the very verge of cold formalism, of many (must it be said the majority?) of our English meetings. The phenomenon is in exact accord with the lack of that aggressive spirit which was so grandly conspicuous in the Church of Antioch. A Church of to-day which should work on the same lines, and, as one of its very first proceedings, should constitute itself a missionary society, would be regarded as somewhat fanatical and irrational, and would be sure to receive judicious admoni-

tions to look at home from those who are at least so far consistent in their advice that they themselves have never looked at a solitary point outside home.

What is the explanation of facts so discreditable to us? Is it that even those who are least under the influence of a mere ceremonialism are nevertheless so troubled about the outward forms and accessories of Christian work or worship that they allow their thought and attention to be distracted from the grander realities of Christian service? To set up an antagonism between these two would be worse than unwise. The one can be done and yet the other not left undone. There may be a place for æstheticism in the worship of the Church. The best of our architecture, of our music, as of our thought and eloquence, should be given to God. But it would be a pitiful plea to urge for the neglect of the world's great need that we had been so taxed to provide a beautiful sanctuary, and to perfect its service of song, that we had exhausted the funds by which the exchequer of our Missionary Society ought to be replenished.

Alas! it may be that there is a more serious cause still. The excessive care for the "pomp and circumstance" of worship is quite consistent with the lack of a strong faith and a burning love—of all, in fact, that constitutes true spirituality. A melancholy state indeed is that of any Church which prides itself on the splendour of its temple and the elaborate trappings of its altar when the "fire" which should ever be kept burning on that altar has either been allowed to



go out or has died down to the merest embers. God forbid that it should be so with us. But just in so far as there is the absence of an aggressive spirit, a spirit which cannot rest, a spirit which nerves to daring effort and heroic sacrifice, is there reason for anxiety on this point. It is not at the option of any Church or of any Christian to be idle or indifferent in this holy enterprise. Activity is a condition of healthy life everywhere, nowhere more so than in the spiritual sphere. The Church of Christ is called to be a great missionary society, and every member of it lies under a solemn obligation to strengthen it for this service. The pleasant excuses with which too many try to justify their own neutrality are in reality nothing better than confessions of their own disloyalty to Christ. My brother, He whom you trust and worship as Lord has loved all men as He has loved you, and He has made known to you the secret of that love in order that you may make it known to all men. All the arguments which you can array against the work are as the small dust in the balance as compared with His august command. His loving voice bids you preach the gospel to every creature. To that call there can be neither demur nor hesitation. "Necessity is laid upon you : woe is unto you if you preach not the gospel."



*THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD.*

I.



## THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD.

### I.

“The earth helped the woman.”—REV. xii. 16.

It is not my intention to attempt an interpretation of this wonderful vision. On it, as on other visions of this mysterious book, commentators in all times have exercised their skill, with little advantage to the elucidation of the symbols and still less to the edification of human souls. The fascination which these hieroglyphs possess for a large number of minds is not very intelligible. The field of interpretation is covered by the wrecks of systems based on the assumption, for which no warrant is found in the book itself, but rather a distinct warning to the contrary, that here God has provided an exact chart of the future for our instruction. The innumerable schemes which have been constructed have varied according to the central idea of the constructor, and one after another has been regarded as complete and satisfactory until some fresh rival has come to

displace it, only in its turn to give place to some fresh competitor with some more striking exhibition of ingenuity. The overthrow of successive schemes has not exercised any deterrent influence on ambitious theorists, and to-day we have a fresh generation of ingenious interpreters, some of whom do not regard a knowledge of the original text a necessary qualification for their work.

Amid all these speculations there has been neither leisure nor inclination to consider what the practical result is. There are numbers to explain the hieroglyphic, few to read the truth. What possible difference it can make to any soul, in its struggles against evil, to be assured of the true interpretation of the mystic numbers, which have so long diverted the attention of a certain class of inquirers from the more practical points of godly service in the world, is not apparent. It must be manifest, however, that there is an end to be secured by a book which has found its place in the volume of Revelation. May it not be that we are invited here to study some great principles of the Divine administration? Here, for example, is before us the great struggle between good and evil, and if, ceasing from the attempts to identify every scene and circumstance of the conflict, we endeavour rather to learn the great principles which underlie the whole, the result may be more edifying, and so even in these obscure pages we may find lessons of encouragement and help.

This is the view with which I have selected this theme. It may not be easy to interpret each separate symbol, nor if we could would there be any spiritual gain. But here is a general outline. The Church is engaged in a continual struggle with the great enemy of souls, and the world watching, and watching even in a hostile spirit, unconsciously helps the Church. *The earth helped the woman.* The very opposite might have been expected. The prince of darkness is the god of this world, and it might have been anticipated that the world would obey the dictates and advance the interests of its lord. There are faithless Christians who are so satisfied on this point that they regard every advance made by the world in knowledge, in freedom, in civilisation, with jealousy and even alarm. But both are needless. The earth helps the woman, not with friendly intent or deliberate purpose, but by the force of circumstances which it cannot control. It is intent on its own advancement and on that only, and with that view it prosecutes its researches in every field of knowledge, makes its own discoveries, pursues its own policy, utilises all the forces which science reveals to it, all the wisdom it has gathered from the observation and experience of ages. In doing so, it unconsciously prepares the way for the advent of Christ's kingdom. Its power is an unwilling instrument which the providence of God turns to ends far higher than those which it contemplated. This is the point which I intend to illustrate.

I. Let us take the "beginnings of the gospel" in Christ. How much did that gospel, in its first stages, owe to the organisation of the Roman Empire ! That Empire was the most marvellous creation of human force, uninspired by any nobler thought or purpose which the world has ever seen. The old Romans were, at all events, free from that hypocrisy which professes zeal for religion, while pursuing ends which are purely selfish, and working out by evil instruments a policy in direct antagonism to the teaching of the religion it professes to advance. It was a simple triumph of military genius and administrative skill, and in these points it has had no superior.

There is nothing to be commended in the means by which Rome acquired this supremacy. The military qualities were, indeed, called forth in no common degree, for the Roman soldiery was celebrated for its heroic daring, its magnificent discipline, its dauntless courage. The story of its deeds fills some of the most romantic and thrilling pages of history ; but there is a lack of honour in the dealings of the Romans with other people, and an unscrupulous pursuit of the prizes which ambition coveted, which compel an unfavourable verdict on the moral aspects of that Imperial policy which, through the successive aggressions of centuries, had been pursued by the great republic, itself one of the last victims of its own ambition. But the result was a general state of peace, in the absence of which the work of the first missionaries of the Cross would have been immeasur-

ably difficult if not impossible. Had the East been split up into a number of rival states, each with its own ambitions and rivalries, its disputes with its neighbours, and its jealousies of all intrusion into its dominions, and each also with its deities and their priests, alarmed on behalf of their temples and rites of worship, the teachers of a new religion would have continually been met by all sorts of obstacles which would at least have limited their sphere of action, confining it to some limited region, and even there making their position insecure and uncertain.

The riot at Ephesus supplies a sufficient illustration of this point. It was an outburst of local passion, which attained to dangerous heights and would have been attended with more serious consequences but for the interposition of the Roman official. But what occurred at Ephesus was what was likely to occur everywhere. The materials for a conflagration were scattered in profusion everywhere, and it needed only some trifling cause—like the disappointed avarice of Ephesian craftsmen or Philippian slaveowners, the easily awakened panic of a trade profiting by the foibles or vices of others—to kindle a destructive fire. To leave one country and pass to another would only have been to tempt fresh dangers, for the preachers would certainly have been regarded as the agents of the enemy, possibly its spies, and exposed to hostile treatment accordingly. The spread of a religion amid the disputes, dissensions, petty wars, dynastic struggles, which crowd the annals of those



Eastern states, would indeed have been an undertaking full of perplexities, of troubles, of dangers, which would not only have taxed the courage of the most heroic and the wisdom of the most tactful, but would have defied even their zeal and energy.

That the Spirit of God could have raised up men equal to the emergency, and could so have moved the hearts of the people, that even under such conditions His Word would have had free course, no one who believes in the providence of God, and believes further, that the salvation of the world is the great end contemplated by that Providence, will be prepared to dispute. But Providence works by human instruments, and here the way had been prepared by the proud conquerors of the world. Peace was an invaluable auxiliary in the work of the Church, and peace had been secured by the establishment of the supremacy of Rome. The removal of the hindrances which would certainly have been interposed by the existence of independent Powers was no slight matter, but this was only part of the gain. The unity of the Empire became a positive advantage.

Take first *the facilities of travelling*. The Roman roads were the marvels of that time, they are the wonder of our own. Laid out for the specific purposes of Imperial administration, no cost was spared to make them direct and convenient, and as far as possible to secure the safety of travellers. Along them the mighty legions of Rome passed and re-passed, as their stations were changed, all of them

converging from the far distant provinces to Rome as the centre of the whole. The extraordinary provision for communication between the head and the distant extremities of the Empire—a provision which was then without parallel—was due to purely selfish motives. It had regard to the necessities of the State and nothing more. But much more was accomplished by it. Along these well-appointed roads over which the Roman legionaries were continually moving, there came also the humble soldier of the Cross. Alone it may have been, or with a few chosen friends moving in quietness and simplicity, without pomp or luxury of any kind—as intent on the conquest of the world as the proudest chief of an Imperial host, but seeking that conquest only by the preaching of the Word—he advanced on his work. Apart from such provision his progress must have been indefinitely slower, if indeed he could have made way at all. Certainly large districts would have been closed against him, and to others the access would have been so difficult that few would have cared to venture on a task so arduous and trying had not the forest been penetrated, or the morass cleared, or the river bridged by the industry and skill of a people who thought no price too heavy to pay for their national greatness. To-day we know the difficulties which an uncleared country presents to our work, and yet we have all the appliances of modern civilisation wherewith to meet them, and the Church has material resources which the Apostolic Church could

not command. If its work was not rendered possible at least it was greatly facilitated by the communications which Imperial Rome had so widely established for its own purposes. Thus "the earth helped the woman."

Again, *the administration itself became an unconscious but powerful ally to the gospel.* Our illustrations must be mainly drawn from the life of Paul as the missionary with whose work we are best acquainted. Take his experience at Philippi. It is not to be supposed that the howling mob who assailed him had satisfied their vindictive hate when they had secured his imprisonment. If the passion of the multitude had subsided, the slaveowners who had lost their "property" would not have rested until Paul and Silas had received heavier punishment. But it was here that the power of Rome interfered. Paul had no advocate; he was not required even to vindicate his own action; he had simply to state the fact that he was a Roman citizen in order to have his prison doors thrown open. Wherever the citizen of Rome went, his rights went with him. So much of the old independent temper and republican freedom of the greater and better days of the city remained that her sons had never been robbed of the dignity and privilege which belonged to them. Their number had been multiplied manifold, the wide area over which citizenship extended had been enlarged with the successive advances of the dominion of the State, often as the crafty device of some ambitious general, but no

abatement had been made in the rights and immunities of the citizen.

The dignity which attached to him is well brought out in the interview between Paul and the Roman centurion who was about to scourge him. "Paul said, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman and uncondemned? And when the centurion heard it, he went to the chief captain, and told him, saying, What art thou about to do? for this man is a Roman. And the chief captain came and said, Tell me, art thou a Roman? And he said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great price obtained I this citizenship. And Paul said, But I am Roman born." There are few more graphic and suggestive passages in the story of the apostle's persecutions. The awe which falls upon the rude Roman soldier when he hears to his surprise that the prisoner whom he was ordered to scourge after the cruel fashion of the times was a Roman, the eagerness with which he hastens to his commanding officer in order that he might save him from so dangerous a violation of the legal rights which Rome always respected, the respect with which even this high officer regards his prisoner when he learns that he had by birth the freedom which he himself had bought at a great price—all testify to the position of the citizen of Rome. Go where he would within that Empire, which was all but coterminous with the civilised world, he had a talisman which insured his safety. Every magistrate was bound to protect him ;

even the powerful soldier would not dare to touch him ; the august majesty of Rome threw its ægis over him as a protection from the blind fury of a bigoted mob. He had a right to trial, and beyond that, of appeal to Cæsar himself. It was under the protection of this right that Paul travelled and preached. The highest civil privilege known to the world of those times was his. The Sanhedrim hated, would gladly have condemned, but they were subject to Roman law, and that law protected the preacher. It was a memorable spectacle. The wrath, the pride, the ambition, the arrogance of man were made by God to praise Him, and the remainder of that wrath was restrained. Even in the tragedy of Jerusalem the power of Rome was the only force that put a momentary check on the fury of priest and populace, but in the case of the Apostle to the Gentiles Rome became really the protector. The career of Paul would early have been closed had his enemies been free to work their will. But a citizen of Rome was safeguarded from the attacks of provincial mobs egged on by heathen priests. It was only when the tyrant who had sported not only with the rights of citizens, but also with the most sacred feelings of humanity, stretched forth his hand, that the great preacher was silenced in death. The years of noble service whose seeds were scattered all over the world, and are bearing fruit even to-day, were secured for the Church by the laws of Rome. The earth helped the woman.

II. As we pass to the period of the Reformation the condition of things is greatly changed, but the same general statement holds good. The fabric of the Roman Empire has been broken up, and numerous states occupy even the territory in Europe which once was subject to her sway. That very division helped the emancipation of the religion of Christ from the tyranny of the priest just as the unity of the empire helped it in its original extension. Had the various kingdoms of Europe been under the sway of a mighty power at Rome in sympathy with the Papacy, the battle of the Reformers would have been far more severe, might well have ended in early defeat. But Europe was parcelled out into rival sovereignties, and in their constant struggles with each other, and with the Pope, to whom they professed submission, but whom they alike sought to circumvent, were the opportunities by which the rising liberties of the Church profited. The stories both of Wycliffe and Luther were remarkable in this respect. It would occupy too much space to show in detail how, in each case, the country and the hour were alike favourable to the work of the man, and how largely such success as their work achieved was promoted by the circumstances under which it was done. England, with the characteristic independence of its sons, with its distance from the centre of the Papal power, and its jealousy of its continual usurpations, and with the passion for learning which was so strong in its colleges, was the very land of all



others in which that noble champion of Christian truth and simplicity, Wycliffe, could find a natural home. The circumstances of the time were peculiarly favourable, and in consequence Wycliffe was able to preach doctrines in close sympathy with those held by the most advanced Protestants—say the Congregationalists—of to-day. His work did not end with his heroic life, for his spirit still kept marching on, and wherever the Lollards were found, oppressed and persecuted though they were, they were creating that Protestant sentiment which was the real strength of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. The more close the study of English history, of which I cannot attempt even a summary which would do justice to the facts, and the fuller becomes the evidence of the debt which English Protestantism and English liberty owe to those obscure heretics, and of the undesigned help they received from the men of the world.

2. Again, Luther was possible because of the condition of Germany, the character of its governments, the trend of its politics. Had it been the Germany of to-day, so far as these points are concerned, he could not have held his ground. There was no lack of will on the part of the Emperor to crush him and arrest his work. When he stood before the Diet at Worms, brow-beaten, bullied in the presence of a multitude of angry princes and scowling prelates, he was apparently doomed to destruction, and for a time seemed almost overborne himself by the formidable



array of foes whom he, an all but friendless monk, had to defy. If he was not immediately struck down it certainly was not from the want of will to strike. But the divisions of Germany were his protection. With the fact of the situation put clearly before him he must, indeed, have been a far-seeing and stout-hearted man who should have ventured, on the day when Luther nailed his celebrated Theses to the door of the Church at Wittemberg, to predict anything for him but a speedy collapse. He was defying the whole of Christendom, with an organisation at its head as compact in all its forces as it was despotic in temper and unscrupulous in method. Intimately bound up with it in feeling and in interest were all the civil Powers of Europe, and if the peoples who had not yet learned their power had been called in, they would have rallied to the banners of superstition and priestcraft. As to the learned men, while there were among them some who were keenly alive to the degradation of the intellect and the corruption of religion involved in the strange perversion of the most sacred truths of the gospel, which had been palmed off upon the world as Christianity, they lacked the faith and courage necessary to a true Reformer. Erasmus was a signal illustration. If, in the absence of a living faith, wit, scholarship, biting satire, fearless exposure of evils could have overthrown the superstitions of Rome, Erasmus might have done it. His satires are undoubtedly one of the most terrible weapons ever forged against the

Papacy, but they effected comparatively little, and when the time of trial came their author, though he had done such true service by the publication of his Greek Testament, not only stood aloof, but threw in his sympathies with the enemies of Luther.

And who was he who had to defy this terrible combination of forces, the learning of the scholar and the superstition of the ignorant, the malignity of the priest and the oppression of the despot, the scorn of the select and the ignorant hate of the multitude? A poor priest gifted with rude, rough eloquence, and strong in his faith in God and the truth. It is easy to reproach him as do some to-day, who are reaping where he sowed and gathering what he strawed, with rudeness and violence. In a work of such tremendous difficulty it is not easy even for the calmest to preserve their self-possession and to be moderate in their expressions when there is everything to stir their righteous indignation to a white heat. Such a revolution was certainly not to be worked out with rose-water. The critics forget how tremendous were the odds and how imperfect the training of the hero of truth for the conflict he had to wage. If Luther had been more anxious to be moderate in expression than to be loyal to the truth; if he had cared more about the susceptibilities of men than about his own duty to God; if he had been anxious for the praise of men rather than for the honour that cometh from God; if he had looked more to the arithmetic of probabilities than to the mighty constraint of love, he might have

had his reward, but that reward would not have been the testimony of his conscience, nor the honour which has accrued from his immortal work. He had not the praises of the world, but he had the unconscious, undesigned help of the world. Influences which were not inspired by any love for truth and freedom told on his behalf. The princes of Germany were not on his side, but their conflicting politics prevented them from uniting against him. He found protection where there was little or no regard for his doctrines. In short, he survived in the midst of dangers that threatened early to overwhelm him. The stars in their courses fought for him. The forces of the world, governed by purely selfish aims, were made to tell in his favour. The feeble monk—poor, all but friendless, warring against both the best and the worst elements in the world of his day—was the conqueror. The battle was not over, for it was to be a battle of all the ages; but at least victory was with the standards of the Lord, and in this strange conflict the earth had helped the woman.

3. If, turning from the story of these individual heroes, we come to a survey of the general history of that great uprising against the priestly perversions of the gospel—the full result of which is not yet seen, and will not be until the whole Church has got back to the simplicity that is in Christ—the phenomena are equally remarkable. Is there a more suggestive story in the records of God's kingdom in the earth than that of the English Reformation?

The leading actors in the revolution which shook off the yoke of Rome were, with rare exceptions, so unworthy of their great cause—the motives which dictated action the result of which has been so vast and so unforeseen, were so thoroughly of the earth, earthy—nay, in many cases sensual and devilish—the way in which some of the worst passions of men became subservient to the purposes and work of the humble and often unnoticed servants of the truth—in short, the contrast between the real aims of some of the most powerful agents in the Reformation, and the issue to which their selfish policy led, is so striking—that the spectacle becomes altogether one of the most instructive, and in its own way encouraging, which a Christian can contemplate. The lessons of these events of history are often unlearned, partly because the record is so imperfectly studied, but still more because the constant renewal of the conflict, which is part of the grand struggle between flesh and spirit, which never will end until the Lord comes in His glory, prevents us from fully realising how much has been gained by the victories already won. As our Reformation is fully understood, it comes to be perceived that the Puritans, despised as they have been, were the authors, under God, of all that is noble and enduring in it, and that in their earnest effort to purge the Church from the corruption with which it had been leavened, they received strange, unexpected, and undesigned help from “principalities and powers” of this world who assuredly

regarded them with no friendly eye. "The earth helped the woman."

Henry VIII. has filled in history the high place belonging to the author of the English Reformation. Of the several potentates of the times he seemed the least likely to undertake such a work. In the early controversies which Luther originated, the monarch had won the title of "Defender of the Faith" (which, strange to tell, still remains among the many titles of a Protestant Queen) by a learned treatise in opposition to the Reformer. This defence of the Papacy by one who was to inflict on it a deadly wound was not without ability, and the distinction which it secured for him from the Pope was highly valued by the king. Who could have foreseen that the very man who fumed and fretted against the daring and insolence of the German monk who had hurled defiance at the priest who impiously claimed to be the vicegerent of God upon earth, would himself live to repudiate the authority of which he was then a self-constituted champion? It was not the enlightening power of truth which flashed conviction on the heart and conscience of one who, to the end, was a worshipper of self. The motives were probably very mixed which impelled him to do his worst in order to overthrow the power which once he zealously defended, and some of whose worst enactments he enforced by fire and sword even to the end. But the passions which found ready accomplices and instruments in men who had their own personal ends

to accomplish, wrought in the interests of truth which numbers of them hated and to which others were indifferent.

The true Church of God, that Church which was hardly represented in hierarchies and priesthoods, and which was independent of them all, had its workers in true-hearted, simple-minded men, living in continual peril, doing much of their work in secret and at the risk of all they loved and valued in the world. Tyndale, Coverdale, and others who gave us that English Bible which has overthrown so many strongholds of sin and Satan, and which, despite the weak concessions of its friends and the sneers of its open foes, is destined to destroy many more, were the true Reformers. It is the common idea of historians who have no sympathy with spiritual aims and works that Henry took advantage of the feelings they had stirred in the minds of the people, and that thus they were made the tools of his lust and ambition. This is the superficial view, but a broader and more true estimate of the facts serves to dissipate it. But for the preparation of public opinion for a breach with Rome—that preparation to which the work of the Lollards had mainly contributed—even Henry would hardly have ventured on such daring action. So far and for the time he was the gainer. But the ultimate result was for the emancipation of God's truth from the restraining hindrances of man. The Reformation, despite its incompleteness, and in some points its inconsistencies,



despite the unworthiness of many who reaped some of its material benefits, especially despite the tyranny, injustice, and sensualism of the king himself, has shaped the character of the English people. Henry VIII. and his councillors did not mean to help the circulation of the English Bible, to promote the freedom of religious thought, which is the strength and glory of the nation, to stimulate the Christian sentiment, which within two generations resulted in such a strong manifestation of Puritanism. But they did it, notwithstanding. His motives were open to grave question, the procedure by which he sought to work out his designs was high-handed, cruel, tyrannical. He was one of the last men to have any sympathy with spiritual aims; he had so little care for conscience himself that he could hardly understand, much less respect, reverence for conscience in other men; in him there was not, so far as we can gather from the records of his words and deeds, a germ of love of liberty. And yet the fact remains, that he was the unwilling, even unconscious instrument of advancing a movement which meant the emancipation of thought, the spread of revealed truth, the proclamation of liberty to many captive souls, the entrance of this nation on a career of religious progress which has exalted herself and been an unmeasured blessing to the world. The earth has helped the woman.

4. *If we turn from England to the Continent of Europe, we find in the story of the Reformation a still richer field of illustration. It is mournful enough to see the*



degradation of the gospel of Christ in the hands of priests who assumed to be its only authorised ministers, and monarchs who arrogated to themselves the office of its protectors and defenders. The whole record is a daring and complete reversal of the declaration of the old prophet, which so tersely and completely sets forth the Divine law as to the establishment of the heavenly kingdom, "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit," saith the Lord of Hosts. Human authority, the coercion of law, the power of armies, the terror of bonds and imprisonment, the craft of diplomacy, the plots and intrigues of courts—these were the forces by which the creed of the Church was to be determined, its authority asserted, its dominion extended. The will and power of the Spirit of God were regarded as nothing in comparison with these forces which the world could employ. But the failure was conspicuous. Strange defenders of religion are these—the Emperor Charles V., ever ready to forget his piety at the bidding of his ambition, the mighty champion of the Pope against the heresies of Luther, who did not scruple to seize Rome and imprison the Pope whose defence he had undertaken, in order to carry out a policy of petty selfishness, to satisfy his revenge or feed his avarice; Francis I. of France, gay, frivolous, steeped in the vice of his court and times, and yet superior to the successors who deemed themselves instruments in the suppression of a heresy with which they did not scruple to tamper when their interests were concerned; Philip II. of

Spain, of infamous and execrable memory, whose zeal for orthodoxy was blended with such politic craft for his own aggrandisement and such reckless defiance of the first laws of that holy religion which he undertook to patronise. It would have been singular indeed if by such means the kingdom of God could have been extended. Yet they were instruments in the work, though in a way which they little expected. They were fighting against God and His truth, and yet their fighting could not be whole-hearted because while professing zeal for the Church they thought primarily of their own ambition. They fought against each other, when, had they been faithful to their profession, they would have united all their forces to stamp out the heresy they so bitterly hated. At one time or other, at some critical juncture in the fortunes of Protestantism, its most malignant foes became its protectors, and the Reformation was saved now by Emperor and now even by Pope. The story has not been told in a complete form. In the histories of the period attention may have been drawn to the strange alliances into which political exigencies forced princes, and the unexpected and marvellous results on the fortunes of a Protestantism which, though persecuted, yet lived and grew and prospered, largely through the agency of foes who hated the truth they were reluctantly forced to help. But these several examples have not been woven into a complete story, the central thought of which should be the exhibition of the mysterious way in which the

providence of God has watched over the progress of His gospel and made even the enemies of Christ contribute to the extension of His kingdom.

Can Christians ever fear who have such a record to strengthen their faith in God and give them full assurance for the future? What God has wrought is an earnest and pledge of what He will do. There are times when, in the aboundings of iniquity, the love of many waxes cold because the faith on which love is fed and fostered loses something of its strength and confidence. At such times nothing surely can be more helpful than such a survey as that which in mere outline I have endeavoured to present. In some respects it may even be more reassuring than the contemplation of the noble work done by the self-sacrificing and consecrated servants of the Church herself. True that without these, without the heroism of confessors who counted not their own lives dear that they might win Christ, without the daring of apostles and missionaries who have faced all variety of danger that they might preach Christ, without the consecration of humble souls in all ages who have, in the obscure places of the earth, been patiently working out God's will in the service rendered to their generation, without the tears and the prayers, the words of faith and the deeds of charity, the toils of the workers and deaths of the martyrs to which the Church of all ages can point, the kingdom could not have grown and extended. We adore God for those whom He has thus raised up, and we fire our own hearts by

communion with that great and glorious company who have been obedient to the faith in all ages.

But how feeble they have always appeared in comparison with the multitudes on multitudes who have always been opposed to the gospel! After the work of the centuries that contrast remains still. Sometimes it seems as though there were hardly a rift in the clouds that are over us, and there are too many Christians so pessimistic in temper, and so impressed by what to them are the ominous signs of the times, that they are for ever indulging in weeping and lamentation and woe. Alas and alas for the weakness of man's faith—as it has been in every age, so is it still. God has ever been giving new manifestations of His love and His care, and yet we tremble and doubt. Here, surely, in the retrospect we have taken is something to inspire fresh courage. David learned confidence from his encounter with the lion and the bear, and when he faced the vaunting Philistine was nerved by the assurance that the God who had delivered him from such perils in the past would save him still. We have an experience more full of good hope and cheer than that of David. Not only has the truth of God been victorious over its enemies, but those enemies themselves have been made subservient to its work, and have helped to secure the victory. “The earth has helped the woman.”



*THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD.*

II.





## THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD.

### II.

“The earth helped the woman.”—REV. xii. 16.

LEAVING the region of history we turn to another line of illustration. Were it desirable to fix upon any single result which, beyond all others, has been an unalloyed and unmeasured gain to mankind, it is to the English Bible that we should give the supremacy. The blessings it has conferred not only upon this nation, but upon the various peoples to whom we have been able to give the same message which has been such an inspiration to ourselves are, indeed, so varied and manifold that the difficulty is to enumerate them. They are intellectual, they are social, they are political as well as religious. Our language and literature are under an incalculable debt to the Bible. Our noblest institutions are the fruit of the free spirit of the people, and that has been largely developed by the reading of the Bible. It has been like leaven cast into a barrel of meal, and the diffi-

culty is to follow all the lines along which its transforming power has been at work. But beyond and above all else, it has stirred us to seek the salvation of that world to which it comes as a message of life and peace. It is extraordinary, indeed, to find critics professing loyalty to the Book and its teachings, who seem to ignore its magnificent history in their eager anxiety to point out some defect in its literary structure which they suppose they have discovered. It is when we contrast the grandeur of the work done even by our English Version of this unique Book with the ingenious theories which are from time to time sought to be palmed off as the true critical explanations of its origin, that we feel the inherent weakness and absurdity of the suggestions which some would have us regard as the most extraordinary results of the advanced thought of this most enlightened age. Too much has been conceded to the pretentious demands of a scholarship which seems to forget that there are questions which cannot be settled by the most profound knowledge of moods and tenses. The point which suggests itself to practical minds, trained in habits of observation and reflection, is how to reconcile the unparalleled achievements of the Book with the extraordinary scheme of its supposed origin which we are told we are bound to receive if we will fairly judge the facts. The Bible will survive all the theories, will continue its great spiritual work when they are all forgotten.

I. The first point which I wish to emphasise here

*is that the Bible itself owes much of its position and power to work that was done without any reverence for the sacred volume or special care of the effect it was to have in the diffusion of its spiritual influence.* The eager researches of scholars in the great revival of learning, known as the Renaissance, and which had much to do with the origin of the Reformation, were not inspired by any pure religious motive. In truth, there is (let Mr Symonds' volumes be the witness) nothing less religious to be found in history than the spirit of Renaissance. It was an awakening of mind which was little short of intellectual resurrection, but it was about literature and art only that it was mainly if not entirely concerned. And yet how decidedly did its influence tell in the direction of a more spiritual awakening! Especially was this so in the attention which came speedily to be given to the Bible, and primarily to the New Testament. Popes, cardinals, and courtiers would have made it all contribute to the gratification of their own luxurious tastes. They gathered their libraries and scoured all parts of the world to collect the forgotten manuscripts of classic literature, they built palaces and churches after the most stately and impressive type, they adorned their halls with the finest sculpture, and covered walls and ceilings with pictures, which are still models of beauty that attract the art-students of the world. This was all that they meant to do, but it was not all that was done by them. The higher service which was being

rendered to the world was that of which they had no prevision, and in which they would have had no sympathy; they were, unknown to themselves, doing the work of another King, even Jesus. They were rousing the minds of men from the slumber of the ages, and when their work was done other forces were in the field with which, from that day to this, priestcraft and superstition have had to reckon.

It would be worse than foolish to underrate the service which the Renaissance rendered to the cause of truth. True, it was essentially Pagan in spirit and character, but it was forced into Christian service. Happily for mankind the discovery of printing came to extend its work, and to make an epoch in the world's story. The printing press became one of the most potent of evangelising instruments, and so, while the scholar availed himself of the new materials placed at his command for the understanding of the Scriptures, this new mechanical invention enabled him to communicate to the world the results of his labours with an ease and efficiency which had been impossible before. What fuller illustration could be supplied of the principle of the text than is given here? No more determined foe of the new Evangel could have been found than the Pope in whose reign it became a power, and yet Leo X. was the chief patron of that Renaissance which was indirectly to contribute so much to its advance. For its triumph it was necessary that the New Testament should be recovered from the oblivion into which it had fallen.

and, further, that it should be so widely circulated as to become the book of the common people. Both ends were secured, but in neither case was it the result of purely religious work. Scholar and printer worked on their own lines and for their own ends, but both alike helped in the grand spiritual movement. "The earth helped the woman."

II. *How much does the Church of Christ owe to the printing press?* Doubtless it has done much evil as well as great good. There are those who have faith in the policy of repression, and who are so alarmed by the widespread circulation of falsehood, or blasphemy, or impurity, by means of the press, that they are almost ready to wish it had never existed, or that at least it could be kept under strict and rigorous censorship. No argument will convince minds of this order, no experience, however wide, will suffice to instruct them. They are reason-proof, they are fact-proof—in the very nature of things they are proof against ridicule itself. If they would calmly consider, however, and give full weight to the multitude of countervailing facts, they would see the childish faithlessness of their fears. Bad books, bad journals are, indeed, potent forces, but happily they are not omnipotent. There is no way of increasing their power more effectual than the use of coercion against them. It seems very hard to learn the lesson taught by Milton in his immortal plea for freedom: "Let," he says, "truth and falsehood but grapple, who ever knew truth put to

the worse, in a free and open encounter? For who knows not that truth is strong, next to the Almighty; she needs no policies, nor stratagems, nor licensings to make her victorious, those are the shafts and defences that error uses against her power; give her but room." That is the voice of a prophet confirmed by the experience of centuries. Timid souls have always shrunk from its conclusions; cowards "drest in a little brief authority" have often used it for the suppression of beliefs contrary to their own; even wiser men have been desirous to impose restraints, but a resistless current has swept away all such hesitations. Liberty has its perfect work, truth and error, good and evil engage in open encounter, and Milton's bold words of faith are continually verified. Even through the very wilfulness and waywardness of men God's own purposes are accomplished and His truth is victorious.

Let us remember only what the press has done for the Bible. Before its invention the Book had been only the property of scholars and of a select few even among them. The finding of a New Testament by Luther was an era in his own life, an era in the life of multitudes, an era in the onward march of Christian truth. The Book was unknown even to the monk, much more so to the mass of the people. It is so no more. It is unnecessary to repeat here the wondrous tale of the languages into which it has been translated, of the millions upon millions of copies which have been put into circulation, of the untold



numbers of readers it has found. The Book, as we know from a variety of suggestive incidents, is often a missionary where no teacher has as yet gone. In vain do any warn us against sending the book without an authorised interpreter, while there are so many infallible proofs that it is itself a lamp unto the feet and a light to the path. What a single copy of this Bible may do Omniscience alone understands, Eternity alone will discover. It may find some profligate in the depths of despair, and its strange message of love may win him back to hope, may restore him to his right mind. It may come to some rude barbarian, nurtured on the follies and superstitions which form the creed of Paganism, and bring to him, for the first time, the soul-subduing thought of a Father omnipotent in love, and by that teaching alone place him on a new moral and spiritual platform, bring home to him a sense of his own sin and degradation, and speak to him messages of peace and pardon, in which he will find salvation. It may find its way into some home of bereavement and sorrow, and its blessed word of consolation may be the attraction which draws the hearts of the mourners to the God of all grace and comfort. The annals of Bible conquest are full of stories of this kind, and yet but few have been told compared with the multitude of such victories over sin and ignorance, over the brutalities of passion and the corruptions of vice which have marked the course of the Bible.

But without the agency of the press the work



would have been impossible. To-day we are able to record with devout gratitude the converting power of a Bible, perhaps of a single Gospel or Epistle, where the voice of the preacher has never been heard. The power of a preacher who can not only explain the message, but can give the testimony of his personal experience to its truth and influence, must be great, but where it has not been felt the Word has done its own work and proved itself the mighty power of God to salvation. It would have been impossible to any extent had not the art of man given facilities for the endless multiplication of copies. They are produced by millions, where manuscripts could only have been prepared in units, or at best in tens. In hundreds of languages the Bible Society circulates among peoples of all colours and climes the message of God's love. The printing press is its instrument, and a mighty instrument it is. It scatters far and wide the precious volume, and what is only of secondary importance to this, it helps on the enlightenment of man everywhere. In that light the gospel finds its fitting sphere of action. With free and instructed minds it has its chief power. It welcomes inquiry, it lives and grows in that atmosphere of liberty which the press has done so much to generate. The world may be doing its own work and promoting its own ends when it seeks to perfect all the mechanical appliances which have made the printing press one of the marvels of our day. Its efforts to utilise its

machinery for the diffusion of knowledge, or the ventilation of opinion, may be dictated by pure selfishness, but the issue is the same. The earth has helped the woman.

III. *If we turn to a cognate subject, the discoveries of Science, the result is the same.* By a certain type of religionists Science is still regarded as the enemy—one of the worst enemies—of Revelation, and if their view were a correct one it would have to be confessed that the attempts to remove or even modify the antagonism have not only failed, but have told in a contrary direction. In truth, the only reconciliation possible must be based on a recognition of the distinct and definite separation of the spheres belonging to each respectively. Let this be once understood, with the consequent admission that while faith cannot contradict the distinct evidence of Science, Science which knows nothing of the invisible world which belongs to faith can have no claim to pronounce on its mysteries and marvels, and then we may reach the further conclusion that there is no hand-maid which religion can employ more useful and valuable than Science. It is the glory of Science that its discoveries, once made, are available for all. There is nothing narrow or sectarian or provincial in its work. For a time its wondrous instruments will necessarily be the monopoly of the privileged few who can command their service by their wealth or their superior culture. But this is only a passing

phase. Nothing is really more catholic than Science. The humblest student may find access to its truths, and use them for his own purposes. And so while commerce or politics or military ambition may lay hold of its instruments and turn them to its profit, they are equally available for the work of the Church of Christ. Science has girded the world round with its telegraphs, has brought men into closer neighbourhood with each other by its use of the wondrous power of steam, has thus, among other things, made the great propagandism of Christianity a possibility. The missionaries of the gospel are carried across the wide ocean, the fastnesses of the forest are penetrated and the paths into unknown interiors once supposed to defy all approach made comparatively easy, the most distant workers brought into communication with the centre. These may seem to us comparatively slight advantages, but that is only because our familiarity with them hinders us from realising their full value. But no careful thinker will so regard them. They mean an indefinite increase of the resources of the Church and an invaluable facility for their administration. Science has given us all this. It has linked continent and island in one continuous chain. By it valleys have been exalted, mountains and hills brought low. It has done so much to annihilate distance that even our brethren in the most distant parts of the world are brought into close and rapid correspondence with us. It cares not for our work, and yet it has been and is one of its most potent auxiliaries.

But there is another line of thought which may help us to appreciate still more the value of Science in its relations to the kingdom of Christ. The word indeed must be used in its very strict sense. Ingenious speculations and clever theories, however eminent the names of their authors and however skilful the arguments by which they are supported, are not Science. I strongly demur, for example, to the inclusion of any theory of Evolution among the established results of Science. What may happen in the future it would be mere presumption to forecast, but at present it can only be regarded as at best a probable hypothesis, and various links in the chain of reasoning must be supplied before it can properly be described as Science. When that is done no believer need fear the result. The truth taught in God's book of nature will never contradict that which is taught in the word of Revelation. We may have to correct many errors in our interpretation of both, but the records will never be found at variance with each other.

As it is, the teachings of Science have only impressed us with a more profound sense of the wisdom and glory of God. It is long since a good man expressed his surprise that an astronomer could be an undevout man. But that surprise must surely be increased by the wider visions of Divine wisdom and power opened to us by discoveries which have given to modern astronomy all the charm of a fairy tale, the fascination of a brilliant romance. The more

vast the universe has become to our apprehension, the more intimate and complex the relation between its separate suns and systems, the more extensive the sweep and the more certain the authority of the law by which the whole is governed and kept in unbroken harmony, and the deeper is our humble reverence in the presence of the great Creator and Lord of all. Surely the more minute and complex the law the clearer the demonstration that there must be a Law-giver, and when once His being is recognised, how strongly enhanced must be our conceptions of His majesty, His power, His unsearchable wisdom ! Are we told that the very greatness of His universe makes the story of a love for our little world which led His Son to die incredible ? Science again supplies the answer. It instructs as to the little things which some might class as mere trifles, and shows that in every one of them are evidences of the same superintending wisdom, the same minute care which is seen in the grander works of nature. In view of this it ceases to be incredible that a world of men, the generations of all ages, may be so precious in the sight of the great Father that He might give His only-begotten Son for its redemption. At least Science may teach us the folly and the impiety of venturing to pronounce what is possible to God. The larger the part of His ways which it unfolds to us the more manifest does it become that with all our searching we cannot find out God. How can it be that we who, on its own showing, have but heard

a distant whisper of the thunder of His power, can profess to have fathomed the depths of His infinite love?

Such consideration ought at least to rebuke the cowardly fear with which some contemplate the advances of Science. True, some of its teachers may be boastful, arrogant, defiant. Why should that trouble those who are intent only on the triumph of truth? There is nothing more certain than that simple proposition advanced with such confidence by the Apostle John—"We can do nothing against the truth." It is the part of Christian wisdom, therefore, to admire the earnestness of men who are bent on discovering the truth, and to welcome every addition they make to the sum of human knowledge. "Our faith stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." As light breaks in from every side, we may have to modify many of our conceptions, but no such changes will affect our faith. Our faith is in the love of God manifest in Christ, and no new knowledge we can gain of the world can disturb our confidence in that. Change is written on all our philosophy and science. It is the record of all history which is set forth in the poet's pregnant words—

"Our little systems have their day,  
They have their day and cease to be."

But Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever. Of Him Science cannot rob us, even though it profess that in all its researches it has not



found Him, and with all its wisdom is unable to understand the mysteries of His nature or the glory of His work. Age after age has witnessed successive revolutions in human knowledge. The sceptre in the world of thought has passed from hand to hand, from dynasty to dynasty. But none of these revolutions have touched the supremacy of our Lord in the realm of spiritual feeling. As He swayed men in the days of His flesh, so is it still. Still there are conscience-stricken sinners like the woman of Sychar, whom He has revealed to themselves, and in that very revelation has made them confess Him as their Lord. Still are there worldlings like Zaccheus, whom His voice reaches in the very midst of their successes and calls to the pursuit of a nobler ambition ; still are there mourners like the family of Bethany, to whom His coming is like the breaking out of the sun from the thick clouds of the brooding darkness around, and His words as the precious balm by which the wounds of the broken heart are healed ; still are there Pharisees and Sadducees of whom He gives loftier views of God and of righteousness, and so wins to the service of that heavenly kingdom which is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. To all these Science has nothing to say. It cannot humble the loftiness of man's pride, soothe the bitterness of his grief, or shed a ray of light to save him from the despair of dark seasons of contrition and remorse. On those problems as to his own destiny which most perplex him it has no teaching to give ;



in the sternest conflicts through which he has to pass it has no support to minister; in fine, in all the most serious realities of his being it is silent, hopeless, powerless. It widens the area of man's knowledge, but at the very point where he most needs a guide and helper, its limit is fixed by the barrier which cannot be passed. Why should those who believe, and believe because of their own living and constant experience in Christ as the one Lord of this world of souls, disquiet themselves about the changed conceptions which Science has given and will yet give of the universe with which it has to deal? There may be attempts on its part to extend its dominion into a region which is outside its realm, and of which it can know nothing, and these have to be resisted. But even these are not to hinder us from gratefully acknowledging its help in the better understanding of the works of God, or from using its many appliances for the work of Christ's servant throughout the ages. So will the earth help the woman.

The same line of thought might be pursued in relation to the world of literature and art. The limits of our space forbid us to undertake this inquiry. It remains to be added that the service thus rendered is unconscious and undesigned. If it were to be argued from this that the Church of Christ, being in the world, has to accept the world's maxims, rest itself upon the world's help, employ its agencies, and even cherish the world spirit, the apparent

blessing would become a positive curse. The most suggestive illustration of this is found in that early story of the Church to which I have already appealed. The Roman Empire was beyond question one of the mightiest forces which the world has ever seen, and it might naturally suggest itself that if its power could be enlisted on behalf of the gospel the gain would be incalculable. When the great Apostle of the Gentiles stood at the bar of Nero it might occur to some trembling Christian that, if the hard heart of the tyrant could be touched, and the persecutor, like the prisoner at his bar, himself become a believer if not an apostle of the faith, how immeasurable the advantage! Not only would Paul be—as by God's mercy for the time he was—delivered out of the mouth of the lion, but the heart of the lion would be tamed and the force at his command become an auxiliary of the truth of God. So certainly it must have seemed to the natural man.

The time came when such a change was effected. Constantine became an adherent of Christianity, blazoned the sign of the cross on his banners, professed himself a protector of the Church which his predecessors had sought to destroy. But the patronage of Constantine worked more evil to the gospel than the persecutions of Diocletian or any of the most bitter foes of the Church. It is not necessary to sketch, even in outline, the evils of which this action was a fruitful parent. It was like the letting out of a flood of corrupting influences. With the wealth

and authority which the world could give there came in also the spirit of the world. Its deadly power was felt in the councils of the Church, in the ambition and luxury of its prelates, in the ever-increasing pomp and circumstance which changed the simple character of the Church's worship, and the bitter conflicts which were waged around its creed. The help of the world had been sought and its coming welcomed. But when it came it came to rule, and the effect of its rule was the loss of spiritual vitality and power. Its worst result was the radical change in the whole conception of Christianity, the degradation of a spiritual reality into a piece of outward form, rapidly degenerating into mere mechanism. That result has not passed away. Men still attach a false value to mere outward and formal acquiescence in Christ's claims, and will always do so while the force of the world, whether in the way of bribes or penalties, legal enactments and political disabilities, social influences and personal advantages, are employed to promote a work which is purely spiritual.

The same principle applies to the dependence of the Church upon any form of worldly support. It is desirable that our Christian enterprises should have abundant resources at their command; but if their character is in any way compromised in order to fill their exchequer, the wealth that has been secured by such unworthy concessions will be as a cankerworm. Men rush into extremes here as elsewhere, some showing a servile and unworthy deference to rich

men, others being just as ready to sit in judgment and condemn them unheard. In the presence of Barnabas the first Church would not have listened very patiently to any one who indulged in promiscuous railing against wealth and its possessors. But there are many hints, even in the New Testament, written in the times of weakness and poverty, when the Church certainly could not have numbered many of the wealthy among its members, that the exaggerated and unworthy consideration shown to money was already a peril to the spiritual life and brotherly fellowship of the churches. The danger is with us still. The world is always forcing its maxims and estimates upon us, and it is not easy always to escape their influence. But when the world's wisdom is introduced into spiritual things, it is so fallacious in its reasonings that those who listen to it are betrayed into constant errors in judgment and practice.

The world continually errs from its inability to measure spiritual force or even to believe in its existence. Hence wherever moral and religious considerations come into play, its boasted wisdom has proved but folly. Take the story of patriotism through the ages. How often in its weakness and poverty has it been able successfully to defy all the powers which men are accustomed to believe omnipotent! Men have looked on in amazement as they have seen the weak things of the world confound the mighty, or the arrogance of the proud

humbled by the strength which the passion for righteousness, or zeal for liberty, or love of country, has given to the feeble folk on whom they have looked down with a scorn they did not even dare to conceal. It is far from invariably true that victory is with the biggest battalions. There are forces which are not represented by chariots and horses, but which will win a success to which these material powers are utterly unequal.

Especially is this true when we come to the realm of faith. There spiritual force is supreme, and in its manifestations is continually upsetting the calculations of the most far-seeing and baffling the hopes of the most sanguine men of the world. Our Lord, indeed, tells us that the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light, but that is not intended to suggest that the latter should put themselves to school in the world's wisdom. The words "in their generation" suggest the necessary qualification in the application of His lesson. It is only in matters belonging to their own sphere and affecting their own ambitions that their wisdom appears. If its ideas are to be transferred to the kingdom of light, their wisdom will be found utterly folly. The lesson clearly is that our obedience to spiritual law and our care to cultivate spiritual force in matters belonging to the heavenly kingdom should be marked by as careful a judgment and as diligent a zeal as the men of this world show in their own proper sphere. That which is of the flesh is flesh,

and that which is of the spirit is spirit, and being so, it is impossible that we can carry on a spiritual warfare merely by carnal weapons.

Is this an unnecessary lesson? Is it not a marked tendency of the times to efface the distinction between the Church and the world, to insist that the world needs to be understood and dealt with sympathetically, instead of being regarded as an antagonist—above all, met on its own ground and addressed with arguments and appeals carefully adapted to its own principles and tastes? The men who were content to bear reproach and contempt because their inspiration was derived from the gospel and their first thought was for the salvation of men, are adjudged to have been mistaken. They were not privileged to enjoy the light which has come to us in these latter days, and a narrow view of men and principles dictated a policy of a corresponding character. They mistook the character of the world, and set up an antagonism to it which was, to say the least, extreme and exaggerated. To-day we are breathing another atmosphere and cherishing a spirit which is at once more intelligent and more attractive. It is recognised that the world is the proper sphere of the Church's action, that its power is to be asserted everywhere, that it is to regulate all the affairs of men, to preside over all legislature and shape its character—that it is to annex to itself the provinces of art, of literature, of recreation—that the kingdom of God is to be set up everywhere and in all things. Let it be admitted



that there is a truth in this, but it is a truth which may easily be so distorted and exaggerated as to become a positive and pernicious error.

From time to time there have been men of noble purpose and high character, if somewhat fanatical in temper and in their religious theories, who have sought to set up the rule of the saints. They fell into the radical error of supposing that the work of the Church was to be done with the instruments of the world. They have always failed—failed so egregiously as to produce reaction often of a very serious character—failed because they forgot that the rule of God must have its seat in the soul, and that efforts to establish the authority of the Divine law by mere human institutions were predestined to collapse. There would seem to be those who indulge in a similar hope. They would fain conquer the sin of the world by legal enactments and human institutions. Public opinion is happily moving in the direction of a more thoughtful care for the weak and the suffering, even for those whose poverty and degradation are largely the penalty of their own folly, indolence, and vice. They would use the existing feeling for the purpose of promoting great schemes of social reform, so that if possible they may save the victims of sin from themselves. Their aim is too generous and noble to allow of any sneer being directed against them, but they are engaged in a hopeless undertaking, for all that they can do even if they succeed to the utmost of their expectations is to dam up the stream of evil here and



there while the spring is still pouring forth a very flood of wickedness.

There is an apparent deference to the gospel sometimes shown by these teachers, but in truth there is little place for it in this new philanthropic world of theirs. In their view doctrines, experiences, religious emotions, evangelistic work, belong to the things which are of little importance because they are so mystical. They would brush them all aside, treating the regard for them which their more devout associates still retain, either as the aberrations of noble spirits, the inevitable signs of human imperfection, or the remains of an old superstition which is dying hard. Conduct, and conduct shaped according to their ideal, is religion; and it must be said on their behalf, that the conduct which they admire is, for the most part, what love to our brethren for Christ's sake ought to produce. It is here that their strength lies, here that they may claim a superiority to the type of religion which found favour in the last generation. They have truer conceptions of Christian duty to the world, they cherish wider sympathies with humanity itself, and so they are doing what very much needed to be done, developing more of the human side of religion. So far as they promote a truer, bolder, and more courageous assertion of the rights of every man to the sympathy and help of his brethren, as they expose the windings of selfishness in the heart and the life, as they teach us to realise more of the

preciousness of man as man, and as they thus make Christianity an active force in ministering to all the needs and comforting all the sorrows of men, they are rendering a service of the highest character. But when they think that these things can become a substitute for Christianity they not only lapse into grievous error, but they are throwing away the only leverage by which the world can ever be raised to the level to which they aspire. Christians ought to be social reformers, and to use all the power which they enjoy as men and citizens for the purification of society, for the recovery of the outcasts, for the emancipation of the oppressed, for the succour of the poor and the afflicted. In this way will the Church, still true to her own peculiar mission, repay, and more than repay, the debt she owes the world. The world has, in the development of its own forces and for the advancement of its own interests, in the recognition of the rights of men, for the sake of good government and the general happiness, secured for us as citizens a power in the nation. It is for the Church to train its members that they use their opportunities so as to leaven all legislation and all social and political life with that spirit of love which they have received from their Master.

In the fuller exercise of this influence lies the hope of the world's future. The story of the past is the earnest of victory which will never end until the world shall at last confess Him King.

“ Then the glad Slave shall at His feet lay down  
His broken chain, the tyrant Lord his crown,  
The Priest his book, the Conqueror his wreath,  
And from the lips of Truth one mighty breath  
Shall, like a whirlwind, scatter in its breeze  
That whole dark pile of human mockeries ;—  
Then shall the reign of heaven commence on earth,  
And starting fresh as from a second birth,  
Man, in the sunshine of the world’s new spring,  
Shall walk transparent, like some holy thing !  
And gladden’d Earth shall through her wide expanse,  
Bask in the shining of God’s countenance.”

*SANCTIFIED USE OF MONEY.*



## SANCTIFIED USE OF MONEY.

“Now as touching the collection.”—1 COR. xvi. 1.

THE most significant point in this text is obscured, if not altogether lost, by the division of the Epistle into chapters. The sudden transition from the lofty strain of thought which occupies the preceding chapter to the very prosaic theme on which the apostle is next engaged eludes observation because of the break due to the purely artificial division into chapters. In the original letter, where these divisions did not exist, there may have seemed a strange abruptness. The apostle has been occupied with the grand questions of man's final destiny, and has gradually moved upward until he reaches the magnificent pæan of victory, in which the full confidence of Christian hope is expressed. In no part of his writings does the apostle argue with more convincing force, and his logic is set on fire by the passion of an ardent heart. He has risen to the highest raptures of faith, and from them he suddenly comes down to a duty which many to-

day regard as so vulgar and commonplace, that it hardly comes within the domain of Christian principle. On the lofty height of spiritual vision, and in the rapture of the hope full of immortality and life, he does not forget the plain of Christian duty, though lying so far below.

With him there is no emotion which is not to bear fruit in consecrated service. The assurance of the coming glory has a reality about it only when it becomes an incentive to present diligence. That seems to us natural enough. The exhortation, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord," is felt to be the appropriate corollary from what has gone before. It is when the apostle condescends to details, and especially to so petty a detail as money, that many begin to think there is some incongruity. But the connection is unbroken. The practical directions about raising money are the working out of that solemn call to duty which comes from that Pisgah which the apostle has been permitted to climb. There is first a general exhortation to steadfastness and diligence in the work of God, and then this is applied to the special service on which he is desirous of instructing them. He is too practical a teacher to foster an emotion which is to waste itself in mere gush. The rapture of anticipated victory is in his view valuable only as it strengthens the soul for present toil and conflict.



He sees no incongruity, therefore, in the association of this call to present sacrifice with the joyous outburst in which he had indulged. As the Master came down from the Mount, in which His chosen friends had been eye-witnesses of His majesty, to find Himself among the sins and sorrows of men, and began at once to deal with the problems that His disciples had been unable to solve, so here the servant has hardly uttered the last note of the anthem of victory before he is speaking of one of the most commonplace of duties. "Now as touching the collection."

There is the more need to insist on this point, because there is unhappily a widespread tendency to treat all questions "touching the collection" as lying outside the domain of Christian law. It would be curious and suggestive to have accurate statistics showing how many regard the use of money, and especially the giving of it for Christian work, as a matter to be settled in the court of conscience and decided by high Christian principle. It is feared that the number would be small; but if, passing on another step, we were able to sift the governing maxims with relation to money-giving of those who make any profession of an endeavour to glorify Christ, in this, as in all other spheres, it is certain that those whose standard could be accepted as a true and faithful reflection of His will would be a small minority indeed. But if we proceeded to a judgment of the acts themselves, the failure in a large number of

cases to rise even to their own ideal would be still more painful. The apostle is not without abundant justification when he tells us that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. It fosters pride, it encourages selfishness, it begets a sense of personal importance, it is covetousness, and covetousness is idolatry. So deeply rooted is it in human nature, and so much does the appetite grow by that which it feeds upon, that it is one of the last passions which the love of Christ casts out of the heart. Few sights are more sad than the manifestations of its power in the case of men who are consistent in other Christian graces, but are utterly lacking in that of liberality. They have cultivated sweetness of temper; they are bold and courageous in their defence of Christian truth; if they are men of intellectual resource they employ it in the service of the Master; they are sagacious counsellors, eloquent speakers, diligent workers, gracious comforters of those who are in distress. It is only when you ask for an offering of money that their weakness is detected. The "collection" is altogether beyond the lines of their service.

It is even sadder to note the multitude of frivolous and often insincere excuses by which they answer all appeals from others or quiet their own consciences. How often, for example, have we heard the plea of poverty advanced by men who would indignantly resent any such suggestion on the part of others, who are almost ostentatious in the display of their

wealth, and who never deny themselves any luxury because of its cost, except this one luxury of benevolence! Strange to tell, the excuse is not always so utterly hollow as it appears to those who look at the subject in a more sensible as well as more Christian spirit. It is the natural product of the current mode of thinking on the subject. Artificial standards of wealth and comfort are set up, and they dominate the thought and imagination to an extent which those who are most under their influence little suspect. There are tastes to be gratified, lawful ambitions to be fulfilled, a position to be maintained, and these require a certain expenditure which is, therefore, assumed to be necessary, and until these demands are met, even Christian men hold themselves justified in pleading that they cannot afford contributions for Christian work. They do not mean to set up a false pretence, and would probably be very much surprised could they understand the view which is taken of their excuse by those who judge it on Christian principles. For if their premiss be granted their conclusion is irresistible. Everything turns upon the alleged necessity for expenditure upon themselves, and that is the point which they take for granted, but it is that which requires most careful proof.

If we say that they are the victims of a false tone of opinion and feeling prevalent in their circle, it is not that we are anxious to be their apologists, but only concerned that the judgment on them should be according to truth. Exaggeration, and still more in-

justice, is sure to defeat its own purpose. The fact may be that, in a great majority of cases, the pleas they urge have never been honestly tested. They have accepted, as do the great multitude of men, the traditions and practices of the society to which they belong without questioning. They fall into the groove of precedent and routine, and have never been troubled by doubts as to its being the line of duty. They may, therefore, be acquitted of any conscious insincerity, or even of any paltering with conscience. The real fault is that appeal has never been made to conscience, or even to common sense, on the matter.

Here, then, is the first and in some respects the most serious difficulty in the way of quickening the conscience on the point. The strong tendency of men to acquiesce in the ideas they find prevalent around them, especially when they are in accord with their own tastes and inclinations, has to be overcome. The conception of life and of the essential conditions of happiness has to be modified. Maxims for the guidance of conduct, which have been regarded as axioms which do not admit of controversy, have to be disturbed. The task cannot be an easy one, and yet, until it is done, the old excuses will continue to be urged.

The first great lesson which has to be learned is that inculcated by the Lord Himself: "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." To deny this is rankest heresy, but

it is a heresy which is popular, and is too deeply imbedded in the whole thought and action of men to be easily uprooted. That heresy is the foundation on which many a human life—is it too much to say the majority of lives?—is based, and Christians have done but little to counteract its influence. It is contradicted, indeed, by the experience of numbers, but it still survives. In serious moments even men of the world will confess how little happiness they have derived from the luxury and splendour, the visible symbols of that prosperity which has excited the envy of others. But these confessions have no effect upon others. Man walketh in a vain show—he disquieteth himself in vain—he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them. This (says the Psalmist) their way is their folly, yet their posterity approve their sayings. Yes, the folly has been repeated in all the generations that have followed; it is repeated still. The picture is a faithful representation of the world's belief and the world's life to-day.

Disciples of Christ might at least be expected to have learned the higher wisdom which their Master has taught. Possibly to some extent they have, but the old leaven of worldly thought has so wrought itself into their whole being, that they find it hard to expel its influence. They may not be consumed by the desire to amass great riches, but they have a conception of what is necessary to their well-being and comfort, which regulates their givings. The real question which he has to settle is as to the

scale of expenditure which, as a Christian man, desirous above all things to serve God and his generation faithfully, he may legitimately adopt. It is one which cannot be answered off-hand, and certainly it is not one which any man can answer for another, or on which a Church can make definite regulation. It must be settled by the individual conscience, and even it cannot decide by any hard and fast rule. The utmost that can be attempted is to throw out a simple hint or two which may be useful in its guidance.

To most minds the temptation to a servile acquiescence in the prevalent ideas of the times or of their social circle on this point is almost irresistible. No standard could well be more fallacious or more uncertain. It has changed materially, not only within our lifetime, but even within comparatively few years, and, in truth, it varies according to the material wealth of the country, or the facilities for obtaining the luxuries of distant lands, or even the canons of taste which may prevail. Culture alone affects men's ideas of what is necessary, or supposed to be necessary, to a comfortable and useful existence. A man's personal wants, or rather supposed wants, vary, too, according to his own circumstances. In the first stages of life, when there is something of a struggle, he is not only satisfied with surroundings which, after a few brief years of success, will appear to him mean and sordid, but positively finds a pleasure in them, which is often lacking in the more favourable



conditions which wealth is able to secure for him. He must have an experience of unusual character who, having attained a position of some wealth, does not look back with a sigh of regret at the more homely joys of earlier days—days of straitness and anxiety though they may have been—or who, at least, would not confess that the simpler pleasures of his lowlier home yielded quite as much satisfaction as the more luxurious and costly enjoyments of his present stately mansion. Not the less does he to-day regard what would have seemed unattainable luxuries in the earlier times as absolute necessities for which he must provide. Is it necessary to add that they are no more necessary than they were, and that he is deceived because of the false standard he has set up?

This is surely a danger of the times. Political economists, philanthropists, moralists, and others who have no care for the religious aspect of the subject urge on others the necessity for a simpler style of life. It is superfluous to say that the standard has been raised to a very large, even to an alarming, extent during the last fifty and even twenty years. The necessities of to-day were luxuries yesterday, and the same process is continually going on. The spirit of foolish emulation, the love of display, the caprices of fashion, are all telling in the one direction, and it must be admitted that it requires no little courage to contend against the strong current of society.

The historian will certainly note this extraordinary



social change—the increased refinement, the extreme æstheticism, and as a result the lavish expenditure—as one of the most conspicuous phenomena of the times. If this growing luxury be to the permanent benefit of the country, it will be in contradiction to all the teachings of history. But its bearing on the national character and fortunes is not within our purview here. It concerns us here only as indicating the strength of influences at work, tempting a man to self-enrichment and self-indulgence.

Ruskin has well said, “I speak from experience; I know what it is to live in a cottage with a deal floor and roof, and a hearth of mica slate; and I know it to be in many respects healthier and happier than living between a Turkey carpet and gilded ceiling, beside a grate and polished fender. I do not say that such things may not have their place and propriety; but I say this emphatically, that the tenth part of the expense which is sacrificed in domestic vanities, if not absolutely and meaninglessly lost in domestic discomforts and incumbrances, would, if collectively offered and wisely employed, build a marble church for every church in England.” There are many greater works to be done before beginning to build marble churches, and so Ruskin himself felt. “I do not (he says) want marble churches at all for their own sake, but for the sake of the spirit that would build them.” But waiving, for the present, this and some other points suggested by these striking words, there is at least one idea

in them which needs to be accentuated. They suggest that much of the expenditure assumed to be necessary is not only sheer waste, but may tend to discomfort rather than to pleasure.

Nevertheless it affords the same excuse to those who desire to evade plain Christian obligation. They cannot afford to give because their money is wanted for the keeping up of their position, for the embellishment of their houses, for the style of their equipages, especially as because, while all this has to be done, they feel bound to pile up a fortune for the children. The simple question is, Are these things all necessary? Dives might have pleaded that he could not spare anything for Lazarus, since the cost of his "purple and fine linen," and the sumptuous fare to which he had accustomed himself, left him without margin. But would it be conceded to him that these things were necessary? Was life impossible without them? Did they serve to make it more useful or more happy?

But in dealing with this subject it is necessary to take a far higher range. In estimating what we can afford for the work of God we do not surely mean to proceed on the assumption that it is only when our wants have been abundantly provided for, even when our tastes have been gratified and the very superfluities of life largely enjoyed, that we can begin to meet the claims of religion and philanthropy. Ruskin, following in the line of the prophet, who reproved the

people after their return from exile because they left the house of God in curtains while they dwelt in their ceiled houses, says, "Have we no tessellated colours on our floors? no frescoed fancies on our roofs? no niched statuary in our corridors? no gilded furniture in our chambers? no costly stones in our cabinets? Has even the tithe of these been offered? They are, or they ought to be, signs that enough has been devoted to the great purposes of human stewardship, and that there remains to us what we can spend in luxury. But there is a greater and prouder luxury than this selfish one—that of bringing a portion of these into sacred service, and presenting them for a memorial that our pleasure as well as our toil has been hallowed by the remembrance of Him who gave both the strength and the reward." It is necessary to supplement this by the further recognition that this ornamental service cannot be rightly rendered until more practical needs have been met. "Do (he asks) the people need place to pray and calls to hear His Word? Then it is no time for smoothing pillars and carving pulpits; let us have enough first of walls and roofs. Do the people need teaching from house to house, and bread from day to day? Then they are deacons and ministers we want, not architects."

These are views which can be logically defended, but it requires some other influence than that of mere reason to secure for them full practical effect. They are in direct antagonism to the inclination of the heart itself. Its ruling idea is that

which Nebuchadnezzar uttered as he walked in the garden of his stately palace: "Is not this great Babylon which I have built?" Everywhere he saw only his own handiwork, and what he had prepared by his own skill and energy was his to enjoy. That is the secret thought of man in relation to his property. Has he not a right to do what he will with his own? No one has helped in its acquisition, no one is entitled to interfere in its distribution. If he chooses to care for others, that is of his own pleasure, and his gifts are of his own free will. If, on the contrary, he uses his possessions simply for his own pleasure, he is equally within his right. Throughout all runs the same idea of absolute ownership, the exercise of whose right none is entitled to restrain or criticise.

It is the gospel which introduces another idea. It challenges the cardinal assumption of this selfish theory by asserting the supreme right of Christ. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price." It appeals directly to the heart and conscience. It would not be difficult, indeed, to construct an argument, addressed to the hard, practical reason, which would demonstrate the folly whether of the man who spends his entire existence in heaping up riches which he has neither the capacity nor the desire to enjoy, wasting his brain and muscle, his heart and nerve, to secure a mere shadow; or of the self-indulgent worldling who spends the years of manhood's energy in a course of frivolous

pleasure, and finds himself in old age without a solitary friend to cheer his utter loneliness of heart ; or the victim of vulgar ambition who uses his money in the hope of finding a place in a social circle where to the end he is regarded as an intruder, or indeed an impudent pretender. But such argument avails nothing. The example of companions and acquaintances counts for infinitely more. The majority, indeed, resent the idea of interference with their management of their own affairs, and will probably ascribe it to envy, or some other feeling equally discreditable.

Of course there are multitudes of things which money can purchase that are attractive. There are all the appliances of a refined civilisation, there are the treasures of art and learning, there are the opportunities for that wider knowledge of the world which travel only can give. He would be a very stern ascetic indeed who would forbid these, and his prohibitions would be of little avail. There is a luxury in which there is not a trace of vulgar ostentation, and which has in it much that adds new beauty to life, lends fresh grace and gentleness to the manners, softens and ennobles the whole man. To persuade men on mere utilitarian principles that it is their duty to practise self-denial even here in order that they may be able to minister to the needs of others, is not a very easy task. Grant that the contention of philanthropy is indisputable, and that he who cares for the well-being of others makes thus the largest

addition to his own happiness, what hope has this logic in the inevitable conflict with the dominant selfishness of the heart? It may be that the answer to its reasonings may not be as blunt and outspoken as the frank comment of a rich man on the Lord's saying : " It is more blessed to give than to receive." " I know " (was the emphatic assertion, uttered in a scornful tone) " whether it is or not." But though it may not be so openly expressed, this is the secret thought in many a man's heart, and against it any hard demonstration that benevolence is, after all, the highest form of selfishness, directs its force in vain. In truth, the plea deserves no better success. If the ruling motive of an apparently generous mode of distributing wealth be selfish, there is in it nothing to admire. It may be better for his neighbour, better for society in general, better for the particular work on which his benevolence expends itself, that a rich man should purchase popularity or influence by large gifts than that he should indulge in extravagant display, which by example, if by nothing else, is a positive injury to the community. But so far as he himself is concerned, his heart remains untouched. The utmost to be said on his behalf is that his moderation is a sign of wisdom, and that in the kindly feeling he awakens in those whom he benefits he will have a pleasure which could not accrue from the display and frivolity of a life of gilded ease and luxury.

But to contend successfully against the proud



sense of ownership, with all that it involves, the universal feeling of the world that what a man possesses, and especially what he has earned, he may lawfully spend on himself—to awaken a sense of responsibility in relation to a man's estate as keen and all-controlling as that which, if a Christian, he already recognises in relation to his spiritual being, the higher motives of Christian love and devotion must not only exist, but must be kept in vigorous play. "Ye are not your own." Is that true, or is it not? Even apart from the work of redemption the answer to this must be in the affirmative. Where is the self-made man to be found? There are many who claim the title and who justify the sarcasm of American wit on one of the class. But it is not true. They did not make themselves. Their native force was God's gift. If they have seen clearly where others were short-sighted or had false visions, if they have been strong and resolute where others have been double-minded and so unstable in all their ways, if they have pressed on with restless and untiring energy where others have indulged in sloth and ease, even if they have economised where others have wasted, or been sober-minded where others have revelled in reckless speculation, they owe it all to God. They may fancy that their own right hand has got them the victory, but its strength is derived from God. Yes, everything—subtlety of brain, energy in temperament, with consequent promptitude in action, the blending of caution



with courage that tells for so much in the practical business of life, and the prosperity which crowns our enterprises thus planned with sagacity and prosecuted with skill, are from that Divine source from which comes every good and perfect gift. Even in relation to the common work of the world we are dependent for everything upon the Father of all our mercies.

But a new, a mightier, a still diviner force is called into play when we are brought under the all-constraining love of Christ. They whom He has redeemed, and who are rejoicing in the fulness of that redemption, willingly own the lordship of Him who gave Himself for them. That is consecration. It is the confession that life, with all which enters into it, is sacred, that mind, body, estate, all belong to Christ, and are to be used under the inspiration of love to Him. This new law abolishes the distinction between the sacred and the secular by placing the image and superscription of Christ the Lord everywhere and on everything. Culture, energy, gifts, and faculties of every kind, money—yes, money—all are talents to be held in trust for Him. It is just that last about which so many hesitate. They will recognise the sovereignty of Christ everywhere else, but when they come into the realm of property they demur, and would fain insist that there at least his writ does not run. But how can it be excepted? What special right can a man have in his substance that exempts it from the august rule which is supreme everywhere beside? Or, to put it in another way, how can there be a complete

surrender to Christ if there be still retained one idol which even love to Him cannot constrain the heart to abandon? For that is really what it means. There is an attraction of the heart to Him, there is a faith in Him, there is a willingness to renounce many things for Him, there may even be a certain elevation of sentiment, possibly a glow of enthusiastic love about Him—but—it all ends when it is suggested that practical proof should be given of all by the dedication of substance. The “collection” is the test which exposes the hollowness of many a profession, so fair in appearance that to suspect its genuineness and depth might seem to be the very climax of uncharitableness. Alas! in the present tone of Christian sentiment on the subject it is hard to bring home to the conscience of the man himself the sense of the fatal flaw in his own offering. He has deceived his own soul by some specious pretext, and will even pride himself on his zeal for the Lord of Hosts, though there lies hidden in his tent the wealth which might have been an instrument of spiritual blessing to him who gave and to those who received, but has been suffered to become an accursed thing.

Love to Christ and selfishness are, then, the two contending forces by which a man's heart is agitated in this matter. The one would lead him to spend on himself, the other to consecrate his whole service to Christ. As the one or the other prevails, so will be his conduct towards the “collection.” All kinds of

artificial expedients have been proposed in order to increase the available funds of Christian enterprise, some of them legitimate enough though painfully inadequate, others below the high level of Christian ethics, and without any plea in their favour except the very poor one of necessity. It is very pitiful to note all the arts borrowed from the world to which Christians will have recourse in order to supply the impoverished exchequers of our religious institutions. They have but a temporary success at best, and are but miserable makeshifts which would be unnecessary were the hearts of Christians more fully possessed by love to their Master. Methods of Christian finance may be valuable, but they are melancholy and insufficient substitutes for the inspirations of Christian love.

“Take heed and beware of covetousness” is the warning addressed by our Lord to us quite as much as to His first disciples, and it means very much. What it forbids is something much more than a mere desire for the possessions of another. It is possible to be free from the evil eye of envy, and to regard the very thought of fraud with abhorrence, and yet to be under the sway of covetousness. On the other hand, the interpretation which finds here a law against property is even more unwarrantable. Such an exhortation would have been altogether out of harmony with the Lord’s teaching, and, indeed, with the context of this very saying. The appellant who wished Him to interfere with his brother in the distribution of the

family estate would fain have had Him lay down some law of property. But emphatically and even sternly He declines the office. "Man, who made Me a judge and divider?" Is it to be supposed that, almost before the words had died away on His lips, He would proceed to lay down a general law which would decide the whole question of property?

Covetousness is a vice of the heart. It is a form, and one of the most common forms, of that love of the world with which the love of the Father cannot dwell. It is not peculiar to any condition of life, for there are rich men who are not the slaves of their money, and there are poor men who are consumed with envy of those who have possessions denied to them. The possession of great wealth may, undoubtedly often does, foster its growth, for as men come to appreciate the homage which is offered to them because of their riches, the higher is the value they attach to the money, which is probably their only claim to such distinction as they enjoy. But the very spectacle—and a very humbling spectacle it is—of the position wealth secures for its possessors, excites the longings of those who have it not sometimes even to an equal degree. It is against the exaggeration of the worth of money, which creates and stimulates the desire, that our Master gives reiterated and emphatic warning, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth."

But the only effectual antidote is to be found in the love to Christ which consecrates everything to Him.

This is the one force which needs to be developed and strengthened in the Church to-day. In an age when on every side are such signs of wealth and abundance, the last cry which ought to be heard in connection with any of our religious enterprises is that of poverty. To compare the contributions of the Church to the work of spreading the gospel with the enormous sums spent on pleasures, many of which are positively mischievous, should be enough to call the blush of shame to every Christian countenance. The expenditure on frivolity, on fashion, on sport is fabulous, and hardly seems to suffer any serious diminution from the alleged difficulties of trade. What a poor trifle as compared with the wicked waste of gambling, with the debasing and ruinous indulgence in excessive drink, with the reckless profusion in entertainments, with the millions spent on warlike preparations, is the "collection" for the missionary work of the Church! True, the Church is not coterminous, even with the congregations of public worshippers, and all who "profess and call themselves Christians" are not inspired with enthusiasm for Christ. But those who are under this holy influence have a power which they have never yet exercised.

The Centenary of the London Missionary Society not only affords an opportunity, but suggests a reason to its supporters for a review of the measure of their service. The "collection" of this year is a grateful memorial of a century of mercies, an earnest pre-

paration for a new century of work. To it has fallen the honour of sending forth as apostles of the faith a band of holy men and women who have won new triumphs for the Cross. To it has been given the distinction of turning the islands of the Southern Seas to Christ—of conquering Madagascar after a great fight of afflictions in which confessors worthy of the heroic days of the Church counted not their lives dear that they might win Christ—of penetrating into the dark regions of Africa and lifting up some of the most degraded children of superstition to the level of Christian manhood—of doing something to prepare the way of the Lord in the vast empires of India and China. The Society which can number in the roll of its missionaries a Moffat, a Williams, a Livingstone, a Philip, a Morison, a Gilmour, and a Chalmers, and which can point to trophies of the power of the Cross as preached by its agents in so many lands, has, indeed, reason to keep high festival. But that festival should mean a new departure, a breaking loose from the bands of precedent and routine, the introduction of new and enlarged ideas of obligation everywhere. So, brethren, by the memories of that sacred past, by all the tender mercies of your God, by the new opportunities which God has prepared, for the sake of Him to whom you have given yourselves, and of the souls for whom He died, in the spirit of true consecration remember this collection.

*CHRISTIAN THOROUGHNESS.*





## CHRISTIAN THOROUGHNESS.

“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one.”—1 JOHN v. 19.

THERE is in these words a key to the understanding of one of the most conspicuous marvels of history, the success of the primitive Church. The victory which overcame the world was faith. Had the faith of these first Christians in their Lord been alloyed by a single element of hesitation or doubt, or had their estimate of the difference which it created between them and those who believed not, been so low as to minimise the value of this new religion, there would have been no kindling of zeal, no glow of enthusiasm, none of the consecration of heart which made them count not their own lives dear so that they might win Christ. They were able to move others because they knew in whom they believed. Their word was not “yea” and “nay,” but one confident, emphatic, and unfaltering “yea.”

It may seem, especially to “advanced” thinkers of our own day, who regard positive belief as indicative of imperfect culture or of weak prejudice, that they

must have been extremely narrow and even bigoted. Little would they have been moved by such charges. They did not hesitate to preach the gospel as a Divine message which would save them that believe, or to set forth that salvation as being a change from death to life. A "perhaps" or "peradventure" qualifying their teaching, an admission that there was very much to be said on both sides, a suggestion that there might be some middle term between the gospel and the superstitions of old heathenism, in which truth might be found, would have been fatal. It was men only who could boldly say, "We are of God," who had any hope of winning those who were under the power of the evil one.

There may, at first sight, seem to be a tone of self-complacency, in which is a near approach to Pharisaism, in this confident assertion. But closer examination, not only of the immediate context, but of the Epistle in general, will dissipate this impression. The last feeling the apostle intended to encourage here was the insolent and self-righteous pride of those who say, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we." Than the spirit which expresses itself thus, or if it does not utter its secret thought in words, reveals it in its whole bearing and conduct, nothing could well be more alien to the spirit of the apostle, nothing could be more in accord with that spirit of antichrist against whose working this Epistle is chiefly directed. There is no trace of boasting or vainglory here. We have a

strong and emphatic assertion of the wide difference between those who know that the Son of God is come and who believe Him and those who believe not ; but it is set forth not as a ground of spiritual superiority, but rather as a reason for devout gratitude and a basis of solemn responsibility. With the joyous consciousness of the high privilege into which the disciple of Christ has entered, there is also an abiding and ever-present sense of the obligation which must go hand in hand with the honour. "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be." That is the glorious heritage which the love of God has prepared for those who are His. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God : and such we are." But this is intended only to prepare for the enforcement of duty. The ideal of character and conduct is to be as lofty as the conception of privilege. "He that hath this hope set on Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure. . . . Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not : whosoever sinneth hath not known Him, neither seen Him."

This is the tone of the whole letter. It would not be easy to find a stronger assertion of the spiritual dignity of Christian life and character, but it is always accompanied with the fuller proclamation of that comprehensive law of holiness and consecration which must govern those who are called to the high honour which belongs to the children of God.

There is much in the teaching as to the relation which the Christian sustains to the Father in heaven that is transcendental and even mystical, but there is a practical side which redeems it from being visionary. The inner experiences may be intelligible only to those by whom they are enjoyed, but they are to have results in the life which will be evidences of which the world can judge. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

The general teaching of the Epistle, therefore, helps us better to understand a passage which, at first, may be regarded as not less intolerant and severe towards the outside world than arrogant in the claims it put forth on behalf of the Church of Christ. Of this kind of temper there are illustrations in abundance around us to-day. There always have been, there are still, those who assume that to them belongs a monopoly of wisdom and goodness, that in their creed is contained the whole truth of God, and that all who do not accept it are to be rejected as heretics, that in the limits of their Church are included the family of God, and that within its charmed circle the sunlight of the Divine favour is enjoyed, while beyond it is the outer darkness. Let it not be assumed that this is a fault confined to any particular section of Christians. There are doubtless systems which are built on this theory, and which in

the arrogance of their pretensions and the intolerant temper which they engender, supply the strongest argument against their own claims. Bigotry, supercilious contempt of all hostile opinion, uncharitableness, and malice can never be fruits of the Spirit, and the system which fosters them cannot be of the Spirit of God. But let us not be mistaken. These faults are in the heart rather than in any system. Is it uncharitable to say that there is no system, however broad and liberal it may be in its own teachings, which has shown itself able to purge this leaven out of the hearts of its adherents? And it must be added that there are few faults in religious character which do more to create prejudice against the truth itself. The world resents few things more bitterly than the ostentation of religion. The superior person can never be popular, least of all one whose superiority rests on the assumption that he is a favourite of Heaven. That may be a small matter to him, since his satisfaction with his own wisdom or piety is so complete as to make him indifferent to the opinions of others. But it is a hindrance to the gospel when its professors attract to it the hostility which never fails to gather around the Pharisee. Goodness is the only force by which the world is strongly moved, and it is certain that goodness will never be self-assertive, proud, or pitiless, even to the slaves of evil, much less to the victims of error.

It is in goodness alone that the apostle finds the real distinction between the children of God and the

servants of the world. The contrast here drawn suggests no mere conflict of opinions and professions, of creeds and systems, but of character and life. The dividing line is that which separates the worshippers of the old self from those who have learned the new commandment of love. The whole world, dominated by selfish passion and sentiment, fired by ambitions and hopes beginning and ending in self, without any thought except the gratification of its own desires, without any God but self, was lying under the power of the evil one. They who, in the midst of this forgetfulness of God and rebellion against Him, were seeking to obey the law of love in all things, were thus proving themselves the children of God.

But while there is nothing here of self-righteousness, there is *certitude*. Love, which is the crown of the Christian character, is in its very nature humble, modest, self-renouncing. It vaunteth not itself, but humbly confesses that whatever it has is the free gift of God. But its Divine origin gives it a special character. "We are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ." If that was not certain the Christian was, as Paul puts it, of all men the most to be pitied. But, being true, the conclusion as to those who were without Christ, and without God, and without hope in the world, was irresistible. To the Christians to whom the apostle wrote, a whisper that in the idolatry in subjection to which the gospel had found them, and from which



it had emancipated them, there was a considerable element of truth, would have sounded like treason to their Lord. The iron of its debasing influence had gone too deeply into their souls for them to be prepared to regard it with this philosophic discrimination. They had not accepted the gospel because, after comparing it with the superstitions in which they had been trained (it would be giving them too serious a character to describe them as beliefs), they were convinced of its superiority, but because the witness was in their own hearts that this, and this alone, was the Word of God. Had they been tested by the professors of comparative religion, they might probably have been pronounced wanting in sweet reasonableness. But at least they knew whom they believed. The grace of God had brought them salvation, and its teaching that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, had been to them a revelation which carried with it its own credentials. Between their present and their former state there could be nothing but irreconcilable opposition. If the world which still remained in that state was in light, then they must be in hopeless darkness. But if they were rejoicing in marvellous light, the world they had left was still in darkness.

The declaration of the apostle, therefore, is nothing more than a vivid and striking representation of the vital distinction between all true followers of Christ and the society in which they were living. It may,

probably will, be characterised by many as severe, rigid; and exclusive, not to say prejudiced and intolerant, but epithets do not hurt, and as even these qualities, could they be fairly attributed to the statement, do not affect its authority, they need not be taken into account. The only point worth considering—and on every ground it is one of most solemn import—is as to the truth of this picture. Does it correctly represent the distance which separates those who believe from those who reject Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Saviour of the world? There is nothing to be gained by the toning down of facts, and nowhere could this ingenious and comfortable process of tampering with truth be more dangerous. It is trifling with the most tremendous realities to give an uncertain sound here, to speak so as to weaken in Christians the sense of their awful responsibility, or to hide from unbelievers the peril of neglecting the great salvation. The supreme, the only point about which we need be concerned is the truth of the teaching. Is it or is it not true that they who believe in Christ know the true God and have eternal life, while the children of the world are under the power of the evil one?

As to the answer which would have been given at the time when the Epistle was written there can be but little hesitation. Society at that time was in a state of putrescent corruption, such as has but few parallels in history. What that means is that the religions and the philosophies of the world alike had

failed to supply true moral guidance to man. The trial had been made under favourable conditions. Greek and Roman are names representative of two great peoples—among the greatest which the world has known. If subtlety of intellect could have led men into a knowledge of God, the Greek would not have fallen short of the truth. If all the charms of natural beauty could have purified the heart, then the men who dwelt under the clear blue sky of Attica, who sailed amid those isles of Greece which still touch the poet's imagination, who wandered by the shores of the Ægean Sea, should have been trained to purest thought. Alas! the scenes which refined the taste did not affect the heart.

On the other hand, the sterner qualities which marked the Roman in the earlier days of the Republic seemed to have in them promise of a full and noble development. But if such hope there ever was, it was doomed to bitterest disappointment. Greece and Rome had both done their utmost, and the result was failure—complete, disastrous, humiliating. The world in its wisdom knew not God. And in the absence of God it had no check on passion, no restraint on vice, no stimulus to virtue. The picture of the moral state of that world into which the gospel came, as drawn by the apostle in the opening chapter of his letter to the Church at Rome, is ghastly and terrible in all its features. But there is not one of them which may not be verified by appeal to Pagan writers. The Roman satirists alone would supply a

sufficient commentary on the apostolic statements. Evil was rampant everywhere. Reckless indifference to the rights of others, cruel tyranny met by treacherous crime, unbridled lust running riot in the extravagance and loathsomeness of its vices, religion stripped of the very rags of decency, and degraded until it became the favourite theme of contemptuous ridicule—these are the things which meet us everywhere. The “lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life,” were the elements which made up the love of the world against which the apostle warns his brethren. What are they all but so many outward symbols of the rule of the evil one?

Apart from and in opposition to this world, deluded by idolatry, steeped in vice, revelling in sensual excess of every kind, was the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its members had themselves once belonged to this sinful, passion-tossed, pleasure-sated, weary world. They once had believed in its illusions, been carried away by its temptations, some of them sunk in the mire of its sin. That sad and mournful experience, which hung like a black pall over the memories of their former life, and which, it may be, had not even yet lost its depressing influence, helped them to understand the difference which is here so forcibly presented. Having themselves passed from death to life, they were not to be persuaded that the death which they saw around them was, after all, only a lower form of life which, by a little

thought and culture, might easily be raised to that much higher platform on which they were standing. They knew that a new life had been quickened within them. It was seen in the awakening of conscience—in the feelings of shame with which they had come to regard things in which once they gloried—in the new-begotten thought for the good of others by which they were influenced—in the sympathetic tenderness and the devout aspirations, the love to God and to man for God's sake which filled hearts occupied solely with the thought of self. And realising all this, and ascribing this marvellous transformation to the indwelling of the Spirit of God, their souls would respond to the words of the apostle, and attest their truth, "We are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one."

This was no question of a formal belief. The truth which they had received was indeed the instrument of their renewal. That truth had set them free from the bondage of sin, and was in them as the mighty force to sustain and strengthen them in their new life. But this made it something very different from some hard, mechanical creed. Had it been nothing more than this they might as well have remained in ignorance of its teachings. There is nothing in the New Testament to suggest or warrant the idea so current to-day, and provoking, as it justly may, so much of bitter opposition, that a certain virtue attaches to correctness of opinion. That depends

upon intellectual processes, to which there does not necessarily attach any moral quality at all. The value of a belief depends upon the power in the truth believed. The knowledge of the Son of God is a mighty dynamic force. In all points of scientific definition or logical defence these Christians were in all probability deficient. But their faith so possessed their minds, so filled their affections, so brought all their thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ, that it had become the central power of their entire being. It was the seed out of which sprang holy desires, spiritual aims, generous sympathies, heroic purposes, which were translated into action. God was in them through their knowledge of Jesus Christ.

It hardly requires much reflection to see that certitude is a necessary element here. The truth which had this power in them was the revelation of God in Christ. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." So John taught, so they believed, and the entering in of that truth had been as life from the dead. Everything depended on its being in very deed a revelation of God. In the very nature of the case compromise was, as it ever must be, impossible. There are very marked differences in degree among those who are under the power of the truth. On some its hold seems but weak, while others are possessed by it to an extent which to cooler temperaments



seems little short of fanaticism. Between these extremes there are many grades, but the truth itself remains the same—the diversity exists only in the minds and hearts affected by it. It is the truth of truths, or it is not truth at all.

For what is this wonderful revelation to which we give the familiar name of the gospel? Dismissing all human explanations, forgetting all the controversies which have raged round it, or the human theories about it, leaving the region of speculation and discussion to philosophers and polemics, what is this gospel itself? In a single word it is Christ—revealing to us the longing of the Father's heart for the restoration of His lost children—Himself the messenger and the message. It is Christ—the Word made flesh and dwelling with men as man, dying for our sins and rising again that He may be Saviour and Lord. That such a truth, once admitted into the soul, should be a great renewing force, is not wonderful. The difficulty is to receive it in all its glorious discoveries of God.

“It is a thing most wonderful,  
Almost too wonderful to be,  
That God's own Son should come from heaven  
And die to save a child like me.”

That difficulty becomes insuperable if it be admitted that such grace was not absolutely demanded by the sins and woes of man. That God has loved the world thus may well stagger our faith. But if it were possible



that without the life and death of the Eternal Son, man might still have been won back to fellowship with God, it becomes simply incredible. The more we meditate on this mystery, the more earnestly we seek to fathom the depths of that love of God, the profounder must be the conviction that here and here alone have we the "true God and eternal life."

Here we are not among the devices of men—this is the revelation of God or it is nothing. It would be a terrible conclusion to reach that all this story, so full of wisdom and of love, so infinite in its pathos, so tender in its sympathy, so rich in the hopes of mercy it sets before mankind, so potent in its influence over the heart, is all a myth. It has blessed humanity more than all the researches of philosophy or the discoveries of science, for its work has been in the highest sphere of thought and feeling where they are utterly powerless. Strange indeed if after all it has only been a growth of tradition and legend. Man would be left without a Saviour, and the light which has lightened the noblest men through all the ages be quenched in utter darkness. The one force which has uplifted man from the deepest degradation, and alone has proved itself equal to conquer the selfishness of the heart, would be for ever withdrawn. But the inveterate unbelief, which would involve the world in such a calamity, is easier to understand than the lofty tone of superior intellectualism which professes to have studied the subject with strict impartiality, and to have arrived at the

conclusion that though there is much to be said on behalf of the gospel, and though on the whole it is the best of all religious systems, yet there are others which may at least challenge comparison with it. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ can enter into no such competition. If it be not the truth of the living God, it is the most mischievous delusion that has been palmed off upon mankind.

It is not necessary that the argument in its defence should be set forth here. My purpose simply is to define the exact position which the apostle here takes, and which is practically adopted by all who receive that gospel which he preached. We are hampered to-day by two distinct but cognate evils: the first an excess of what is amiably described as Christian charity, the other a philosophical mode of regarding the gospel which is in imminent danger of losing its spiritual essence. Hence there is too often an apparent shrinking from boldness and decision whether in act or speech. A strong utterance, like that of the apostle here, is regarded as a sign of ignorance or prejudice, to be condoned in men of imperfect knowledge, but altogether unworthy in the student who has made himself familiar with systems differing from his own. Culture, it is assumed, must correct faults which are to be expected from dwellers in caves, but are impossible to those who have come out into the sunlight and taken a broader survey of men and opinions. Those who pass these judgments and take credit for the superior

intellectual discernment which they show, and the large-hearted liberality by which they are inspired, appear absolutely unconscious of the intolerance with which they themselves may be charged in return. Their bigotry on the side of advanced and liberal thought may be described by some more pleasant name, but it is bigotry all the same, as one-sided in its estimates and as full of prejudice as that which it so sternly condemns. The men who feel that the truth in Christ Jesus admits of no compromise may be as generous in their judgments of those whom they must believe in error, unless they are prepared to confess that they have themselves followed a cunningly devised fable, as the critics who brand them as the slaves of tradition or the victims of theological bigotry. These latter extend such an indiscriminating hospitality to all new ideas that they create the impression that there is no certainty, that in every system there is a blending of truth and error in equal proportions, and that he is the wisest man who interests himself impartially in all, but cultivates no strong or fixed attachment to any. If it be bigotry to dissent from a view which with all its boasted liberality treats men of faith as credulous dupes, if it be bigotry to assert that we have tasted and felt and handled of the good word of life, then bigots we must be content to be. Better such bigotry than a disloyalty to our most sacred convictions, and above all treason to that blessed Lord who has redeemed us, and whom we dare not put to an open shame by consenting

to conceal or deny His exclusive right to be trusted and adored as the Saviour of the world.

It is only when Christianity is studied solely or chiefly as a religious system that this so-called liberalism is possible. The religious scientist who has devoted himself to an examination of the origin and progress of the different faiths of the world, and regards them all chiefly as supplying material for interesting speculation and research, may fall into this error. He is surprised to find analogies and points of resemblance where he least expected, and he magnifies their significance. It is when we go out of the study into the world, turn from speculation to the toil and suffering of daily life, and instead of seeking out real or fancied resemblances in theories, compare their practical results, that the true grandeur of the gospel becomes apparent. There is difficulty in the comparison, because there is much of mere lip-service to Christianity, which demands recognition as though it were true and loyal obedience, but in which there is little if any depth of principle. But take a Christian people, with all the deductions that have to be made for the mere outwardness and formalism of many, and the acknowledged imperfection even of those who are most under its sway, and place them by the side of a nation formed under the influence of heathenism, and the comparison becomes a contrast in which is developed the wondrous renewing power of the gospel of Christ.

England to-day has innumerable faults. It has,

indeed, scant right to the name of Christian at all, for while it has Christian institutions, Christian teaching, and, in the lives of numbers of its people, Christian living, with a multitude of agencies at work for Christian propagandism, and while the majority of its people would resent any suggestion of their disloyalty to Christianity, there is much speculative doubt and still more practical unbelief. Many and dark are the spots on our feasts of charity, grave, serious, and extensive the discount to be taken off the Christian profession of the nation. The want, the degradation both physical and moral, the sorrow and suffering of the dwellers in slums are continually before us, while at the other extreme we have the "social sins," the profligacy, the reckless dissipation, the wasteful extravagance, the contempt of moral obligation, and sometimes even of social decency, which supply so fruitful a theme for our satirists and moral instructors. There are some who tell us that even among us the force of the gospel is waning, and promises soon to become obsolete, that men of culture no longer believe, that the Puritan—under which term are included all who seek to obey the law of Christ in its simplicity and fulness—is a being of the past, and that the Bible, by whose teachings he was formed, is passing into the same oblivion as himself. With the recollection of the empty vauntings of unbelief in former times, and the refutation which time has given to them, we can easily afford to smile at these premature boasts of unbelief, or the more unworthy

ears of that strange anomaly, Christian pessimism. But at least all this has to be taken into account when estimating the amount of Christian force in the nation. There are a multitude of influences telling upon it for good, and these may be more numerous and potent than in times of depression we are able to perceive. An acute writer of the press, correcting the exaggerated estimates which are so prevalent, and which are so eagerly welcomed by the enemies of the gospel, says, "It was under the Regency the seed was sown which so nearly made England sternly Puritan for the second time. We are not sure that it is not growing Puritan again at this minute, though the smart set is so lax."

These estimates of current tendencies are apt to be more or less coloured by our own feelings. But whatever credence be given to this hopeful view, at least it must be admitted that the gospel has many adversaries, and that beyond the host of enemies are many who "profess and call themselves Christians," in whom there is at best little more than the form of godliness. But despite all this, what is the religion of Christ doing at this hour for the people of England? If we would measure it, we must not confine our observation to the purely religious (the term is used in its narrowest sense) work of the Churches—the building of churches, the maintenance of the ministry of the gospel, the organisations for the evangelisation of those who are without the knowledge of God. These are doing a great and blessed



work, but even the aggregate of these agencies is but an imperfect representation of the influence which the gospel is employing in this country. It is common to pour contempt on religious machinery. The sneer is very cheap, but it is correspondingly worthless. The machinery of religious philanthropy has behind it an amount of unselfish zeal, true enthusiasm for the good of humanity, unpretending courage, and generous self-sacrifice, which are an incalculable gain to society. But these are far from exhausting the happy influence which the religion of Christ keeps continually in action. Every family in which God is feared and worshipped is itself a centre of sweetness and light—every soul which is in living fellowship with Christ does much to purify the atmosphere of society, and to bring in the days of heaven upon earth. Where is the religion that has produced similar results? The apostle, with that breadth of sympathy and candour of judgment which were characteristic of him, tells of Gentiles who have no law and yet do by nature things contained in the law. Such exceptions there have been in all ages—such exceptions there are still. But they do not at all affect the teaching of the apostle. That teaching is that in Christ alone have we the revelation of the Divine love—that they only who know the Son of God is come are of God, and that the world which is without Him lies in the evil one. He is comparing not two systems of opinion, but two principles of life: the one is Love and is of God, the other is Self and



is of the evil one. The idea has been fully caught, and is well expressed by the poet when he says—

“ Yet one word more. They only miss  
The winning of the final bliss

Who will not count it true that love,  
Blessing, not cursing, rules above,  
And that in it we live and move.

And one thing further make him know  
That to believe these things are so,  
This firm faith never to forego,

Despite of all which seems at strife  
With blessing, all with curses rife,—  
That this *is* blessing, this *is* life.”

What, then, is branded as narrowness in this utterance of the apostle's is simply thoroughness. It is very instructive to mark the quiet confidence with which he speaks—he who was but a leader in a sect everywhere spoken against, the representative of a minority so small that it would scarcely have been taken into account in a religious census of the day, does not hesitate to assert, without qualification, “ We know that we are of God.” As there was no assumption of personal superiority in this claim, so was there as little of uncharitableness in the converse—“ The whole world lieth in the evil one.” It was neither more nor less than a declaration, again to use the poet's words—

“ That he, and we, and all men move  
Under a canopy of love  
As broad as the blue sky above.”

It is in Christ only that this love is revealed—it is from Christ only that this wonderful truth is learned; and apart from Him it would be nothing better than a dream—bright and beautiful it might be, but without that certainty which alone makes it a fountain of inspiration and a well-spring of perennial comfort.

Why, then, should we who have this faith not express our assured confidence? Thoroughness is not self-assertion, is not pride, is not bigotry—it is simply the assurance of faith, in the absence of which our religion itself is weak and profitless. The reason why there is so much that is flabby, nerveless, forceless in much of the religion of the day is that it lacks the certitude which alone makes the gospel a living power. Of all questions, those which belong to the soul and its eternal destinies are those in which trifling is least tolerable. A religious dilettantist to whom the great verities of the gospel are subjects merely of curious speculation will never influence the world, because he finds in religion neither consolation nor stimulus, light nor heat, for himself. The men whom he despises as mere fanatics, because their faith is to them a reality, will achieve great and enduring results, while he dreams away the golden hours of life. Thorough men always have made and always will make history, and

nowhere is this more true than in the work of the Church.

But the thoroughness must be in the heart and life as much as in the creed. It means more than undoubting belief; it is lowered indeed if it be confounded with orthodoxy; it is the possession of the soul with the truth. It is a new life in God and to God, and its most constant manifestation is in care for those who are still in the evil one. The spiritual pride which would look down on them with Pharisaic scorn or sanctimonious pity, the indifference which would pass them by as unworthy of sympathy, the exclusiveness which would rejoice that the saved are but a "little flock," satisfied so long as we are of its number, all suggest that we ourselves are not of God. But, to my judgment, worse than all is the suggestion that though we are of God the difference between us and those who are still in the world is so slight that it is not necessary for us to seek to bring these wanderers back to their Father's house.



*THE MODERN SADDUCEE.*



## THE MODERN SADDUCEE.

“Take heed and beware of the leaven of the . . . Sadducees.”  
MATT. xvi. 6.

OUR Lord's use of this figure to describe the working both of His own gospel and of the errors which were most opposed to it was specially significant. “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman hid in a barrel of meal until the whole was leavened.” As no more emphatic condemnation of the widespread expectation of the Jews that the kingdom of God would come with observation could have been pronounced, so nothing could give a more suggestive picture of its true nature and the method of its working. Men have always been too prone to fix attention on the outward, the formal, the visible. They have always been fond of prescribing exactly what men are to believe, how they are to feel, what they are to do. They have framed cast-iron creeds which must be accepted, laid down ceremonial laws which are to be observed, set up Church authorities which must be supreme, and so they have sought to



establish the kingdom of God. The Lord teaches that His kingdom is not in any or all of them—that its seat is in the heart—that it is a spirit—a living, quickening, purifying spirit—that it works secretly but mightily.

A similar idea is implied here. Pharisee and Sadducee both had their faults; their teaching in some of its parts was false—their practices more or less mistaken. But what was most to be dreaded in both of them was the subtle influence of their spirit. The point, then, which in both cases the figure presents and emphasises is that in truth and error alike there is a dynamic force—that in the former case, therefore, the chief value of truth is not in the intellectual correctness, but in the spiritual power it exerts, and that it is nothing so long as it remains a mere theory, but becomes a Divine influence when it leavens heart and life—and, on the other hand, that the danger of error goes far beyond a mistaken or perverted conception. Even were this so, the mistakes are to be deplored and as far as possible corrected. But it is in the moral influence which is exerted by the false principle that the peril lies. If the mind be possessed by error, the judgment will be warped, the conscience dulled or misled, and so the entire nature and life become degenerate. It is this against which the Lord warns us. A comparatively slight error which in the beginning may have been only an exaggeration of a truth, may be as leaven in the mind and heart. A habit of thinking may be

formed which will affect our views of everything. It grows to be a tendency which acts with a steadiness and a force that defy resistance. Two such tendencies he singles out for special notice as those which on various grounds are most to be dreaded. Pharisees and Sadducees were drawing men away from the simplicity of that childlike faith by which alone men could enter the heavenly kingdom. They are with us to-day. Their particular errors are different from those of their predecessors, but the spirit which is in them is the same, and that spirit is in human nature. The caution is as necessary as ever.

The warning, then, is against a spirit rather than a creed. It needs, too, to be carefully distinguished from that inquiring spirit which we are enjoined to cultivate, and in the absence of which our homage to truth is sure to lack intelligence and reality, and to become little better than acquiescence in traditions and forms. It is, indeed, much more a quality of the heart than the head. There is an unbelief in which there is not a touch of the Sadducee sentiment, and there is a belief which is so saturated with its influence that it has lost all enthusiasm. It is the carping, captious, cavilling rather than the inquiring spirit. It has no belief in lofty ideals, no sympathy with generous aims, no patience with fervid zeal. There is nothing in which it finds greater pleasure than in scattering the illusions and chilling the enthusiasms of ardent spirits. It loves to destroy what it regards as the tinsel of sentiment, and gloats with

indecent pleasure over the wreck it has wrought. Appeals to the abstract sense of right, to broad and generous human sympathies, to the august majesty of conscience, are, in its view, tawdry ornaments of rhetoric and poetry, only to be treated with scorn. When it has to deal with noble thoughts, and still nobler deeds, it has no appreciation of that which is really grandest, and is never at a loss for some selfish explanation of that which commands the sympathy and admiration of true hearts.

One trait, at least, is common to the Sadducee with the Pharisee. Alike they are satisfied with themselves and contemptuous of all who are not of their school. It is hard to tell, for example, whether it is the voice of the Pharisee or the Sadducee to which we are listening in the reply of the Sanhedrim to the officers who had failed to execute its commands. "This people who knoweth not the law is accursed." Its arrogance, its insolent assumption of superiority, its contempt of those Diviner instincts which often guide simple hearts to truth, missed by the wise and prudent, are equally characteristic of both. But in the Sadducee there is the sneer of the cynic, the hard thought of the mere materialist, the scoff of the man to whom the spirit-world is an illusion. This scoffer is amongst us still—a man of the world who has his portion in this life, who believes only in what he can see or feel and handle, who has supreme contempt for sentiment and everything which trenches on it. Or he is a representative of culture, and

looks to it as the one skilled physician for all human diseases. He distrusts all appeals to sentiment, he regards faith as hardly, if at all, removed from superstition, he trusts to government by reason and reason only.

Our Lord warns us not so much of the Sadducee himself as of the leaven of his doctrine. It is in the subtle, insidious, penetrating influence of his spirit that the chief danger lies. When he appears in his own character, states his difficulties, challenges the teaching to which he is opposed, he can be met with countervailing argument. It is in the tendency which he develops, and which he seeks to foster in others, that the peril becomes most serious. A world in which is nothing that does not admit of scientific explanation, which moves on as a piece of mere mechanism, undisturbed by any influence from without, where the fervour and zeal of noble souls count for nothing, and are, in fact, but wasted forces, is the Sadducee's ideal. He may be able to admire genius, but he believes in its power only as it is able to accomplish some material result, which may be weighed, or numbered, or measured—tested by the crucible or expressed in figures and statistics. With any idea of the supernatural he has no patience, and whenever it is suggested, his doubts and cavillings begin. He may not deny the possibility of such interference, but he has found no evidence of it, and indeed finds it impossible to conceive how such evidence could possibly be furnished.

This is the leaven which is to be dreaded, and it is actively at work in our days. There is a revolt of intellect against faith, a desire to bring the whole universe within the compass of man's poor philosophy, a distrust of emotion, an endeavour to rob the religion of Christ of that which gives it distinctive character. If this were only in the world outside there would be nothing new or disquieting in the phenomenon. But it haunts the Church of Christ, and wherever it comes it is chilling in its influence, unfriendly to all the noblest enterprises of faith, tending to weaken the spiritual force of the gospel and convert it into a cold philosophy, encouraging the intellectual curiosity of the old Gnostic, but at the same time doing it in an Agnostic temper. To all purely spiritual service—service inspired solely by spiritual motives, employing only spiritual forces and seeking only spiritual ends, dealing with man as a lost child of God—whose return to the Father is the first condition of present and future blessedness—the Sadducee is opposed. The world of souls is to him dreamland, and he looks with scornful pity upon those who concern themselves about its illusions. Sufficient for him the realities of the present life, which impose a sufficient burden upon his thought and energy.

It might be supposed that a spirit of this kind could never affect a Christian at all. And where the Christian rises to the level of his own profession this must be so. A loyal and devoted servant of Christ cannot be

a Sadducee, cannot admit even the touch of Sadducee sentiment in his heart. By faith he is a Christian, and on the strength of that faith he scorns whatever would cast a doubt upon the love, or faithfulness, or power of his Lord. He can treat with indifference the confident assertion that the spiritual miracles which the grace of God is to work in the world are impossible, for his own experience testifies to the contrary. He is himself a miracle of grace, and he cannot doubt that what the grace of God has done for him it can do for all mankind. He may be worsted in many a logical encounter, but he cannot be robbed of the testimony of his own experience. He was blind, but now he sees, and this one fact, which is beyond all reasoning or dispute, and is to him as much a certainty as the fact of his own existence, outweighs all the doubts and cavils which objectors can start.

This may seem simple and incontrovertible, and yet who would venture to deny that the Sadducee temper does, consciously or unconsciously, affect even the Church of Christ? Of actual doubt there may not be much, or if it exists it may not often find expression. But there may be indifference where there is not hostility. There are, for example, in our churches some whose attitude towards Christian missions is one of neutrality, which is hardly benevolent. It would need some courage on the part of any man who still claims to have a place in the Church of Christ, directly to challenge and oppose the appeals of those who are possessed by the mis-



sionary idea. Perhaps one who himself has lived in the midst of heathenism, and has realised something of what it means as a dishonour to God and a degradation to man—whose soul has been stirred as was the soul of Paul when, walking amid the beauties of the old Athens, the one thing that fixed his thought and fired his zeal was the spectacle of a people given up to idols—and he is able, therefore, to put peculiar pathos and force into the appeal to his own fellow-Christians of England, “Come over and help us.” How is a servant of the same Lord, owing to Him the same devotion, anxious himself to be regarded as equally passionate in his loyalty, to answer such an address? He cannot, dare not suggest that the gospel is a message only for one nation or class of men, for its first principle is that God has loved the world, and His grace which bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. He cannot take refuge in the suggestions of unbelief that, after all, the difference between the Christian and the Pagan is not one of vital importance, for that would be to give the lie to all his own professions, and to confess that his whole Christian life had been a gigantic fraud. He cannot even allege that the conversion of the world is not to be accomplished by the Church, seeing that the New Testament, alike in spirit and letter, teaches that the one agency which God will employ is that of men who, having been converted themselves, are moved by a passion they cannot resist to convert others; and, above all, that the Lord has left as His



last command this charge, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Direct answer, therefore, is impossible.

But there is a mode of dealing with missionary appeals which contrives very successfully to evade their force without directly impugning their authority. It is possible, indeed, to profess great sympathy with the boldest thoughts and most heroic efforts of those who feel the pressure of that Divine necessity which compels them to labour for a world's salvation, to show the interest of curiosity if of nothing else in all their movements, and to express hearty admiration for the noble leaders in such enterprises, especially when they have achieved a reputation, and yet secretly nurture a scepticism as to the wisdom of their efforts which hinders anything like generous and noble sacrifice in the service. It is not to be denied that the work does demand sacrifice, and sacrifice will be sustained only by enthusiasm. But to enthusiasm the Sadducee temper is absolutely fatal. Let a man once become infected by it in however slight a degree, and he will speedily find out reasons for withholding his sympathy and his effort.

We are familiar in the political world with men who indulge in high soundings of devotion to the cause of righteousness and freedom, but whose practice gives the lie to all their professions. They are friends of progress in the abstract, but they find reasons against every particular measure of reform.

They are intense in their opposition to every wrong, but they are so quick to perceive objections to any and every proposed scheme of redress that, as a matter of fact, they are in practice the stoutest defenders of all vested rights and established abuses. Their satire of injustice, of pompous assumption and pretence, even of antiquated forms, out of which the meaning has departed, and which are perpetuated only for selfish ends, is sufficiently keen ; their expressions of sympathy with the victims of the indifference of society or the greed of individuals are many and fervid ; they indulge in the most eloquent platitudes about grand fundamental principles, and insist with vehement urgency on the necessity of social and political reforms. And yet they are not reformers. In short, the most bitter opponent is not so much to be dreaded as the men who accept all your principles and are in sympathy with all your aims, but never fail to find some fatal objection to all your methods.

These are our political Sadducees, and they have their counterpart in the Church. The latter would not have themselves suspected of being half-hearted Laodiceans ; but they do nothing to show that they are hot, and if they are not to be described as lukewarm, it is because, judged by every reasonable test, they must be pronounced pitifully cold. They will sing the spirit-stirring hymns in which the Church expresses her devotion to her Lord and exults in the assurance of the coming of His kingdom, and are never troubled by a doubt as to their own con-

sistency, though they do nothing to advance the triumph on which, if their hymns were songs of the heart, they must be intent. They believe in the salvation of the world, but apparently they have never given themselves to consider how it is to be accomplished, and least of all to ask what part they are to take in the work. They are so bent on pointing out the defects in the policy and labours of more earnest Christians that they fail to recognise the high motives by which they are prompted, or the grand results which already they are accomplishing. They can make no allowance for any mistake of simple-hearted men whose passionate love may seem to trench on fanaticism, and instead of supplying the corrective which, if graciously administered, might prove of lasting advantage, they do their utmost to quench enthusiasm by a criticism, heartless, pitiless, and faithless. A Christian cynic is surely a paradox, and yet he may be found, and wherever found, is a source of weakness and mischief. But ours is a critical age, and there are numbers who are never more happy than when they are ruthlessly trampling upon sentiments which, even if they have in them some elements of weakness, are too tender and too sacred to be handled save with the most delicate touch. Our fathers, we are told, were deficient in culture and fell into errors which it is the business of this new and enlightened generation to correct. And the one essential to this is that we beware of too much zeal, too much

emotion, too much excitement. What is really meant is that our faith must not be too confident, that our love to Christ must be held in by wise restraint, that in our loyalty to Christ there must not be that chivalrous devotion in which self is forgotten; in short, that we must not be betrayed into an enthusiasm which throws to the winds the calculations of human wisdom whenever Christ summons to work or conflict.

There are two examples in Scripture of the Sadducee temper which are eminently instructive. The first is found in the sneering question of Satan, "Doth Job serve God for nought?" At the root of the Sadducee's criticism lies this cold disbelief in unselfish goodness. Such disbelief certainly ought to be left to a world which, having no faith in God, naturally distrusts man. But they who have the beginnings at least of a better life in themselves should find no difficulty in understanding and appreciating the most impassioned and self-forgetting enthusiasms of other souls who have felt the touch of the Spirit of God. It is not necessary to abjure the exercise of sound judgment in the estimate either of individual acts or of the character of which they are the index. To sit in judgment on others can, indeed, never be a profitable exercise, and yet there may be cases in which it is almost imperatively necessary to exercise a wise discrimination. But it is not Christian when it starts with the assumption that every man is to be accounted a slave of selfishness until he has

vindicated his claim to a nobler character. That may be the verdict of the world, but the law of Christ is based on a more generous and noble principle—the principle which underlies the presumption of human justice in favour of a man's innocence until evidence has convicted him of guilt.

The suggestion of Satan that every man has his price is not true of numbers who are not under the rule of Christian principle. There are patriots who would not sell their country, however large the bribe offered for the treason. There are men of honour who would follow the lead of righteousness without ever starting the question of reward. There are loving hearts which inspire sacrifices and toils as unstinted as they are without hope of payment. How can it, then, be true that there is no unselfish consecration to God?

Let it be remembered that the question comes from the archangel of darkness, and is expressive of that radical and absorbing selfishness which is embodied in him. The Sadducee has caught his tone and repeats his doubt of all human goodness. He never hears a generous sentiment but he concludes that it has been uttered only for the sake of effect. He never studies a pure and noble character that he does not at once suggest some qualifications of its virtue and find some unworthy explanation of actions which command the hearty admiration of unprejudiced observers. He never allows himself to be carried away out of his miserable cynicism even by the

noblest deed of heroic service, but while others are fired by its example, he at once begins to speculate as to the advantage which may accrue to the doer. The process is not a difficult one. There are cynical suggestions which may be started in most cases, and in the common temper of mankind they meet with too ready credence. Trench, in his "Lectures on Words," notes, as one evidence of the prevailing tendency of the heart, that prejudice which, in its origin, is a neutral word, has come to have an evil signification. If we speak of prejudice in relation to a man, without any qualifying adjective, it is assumed to be a prejudice against him. With this prejudice in the heart there is little difficulty in persuading men to attribute the noblest religious service to pure selfishness. The inquiry of Satan does in reality represent a falsehood which he has imposed upon the world. The scornful laughter of the great majority echoes his cynical question, "Does Job serve God for nought?"

The taunt is one which is sometimes used even in regard to the work of Christian missionaries. It is true that they lead lives which are necessarily full of difficulty and privation. That they are voluntary exiles from their native land, is a trial which they endure in common with numbers of their fellow-countrymen. Our little island is represented in every part of the known world by some of her gallant sons, who in quest of adventure or of wealth are contemptuous of the privations and perils to which they are exposed. But the con-



ditions under which our missionaries live and work are so essentially different from those of Englishmen in other vocations that they hardly admit of comparison. The missionary takes up his abode among the natives to mingle with them in their common life, to make himself familiar with all their modes of thinking, to bear with their prejudices and their opposition, to become all things to them in order that he may win them for Christ. The loss of congenial society to which he is almost of necessity doomed means very much ; the close contact with much that is repellent to every feeling of his nature is very much more. The work in which he is occupied is one that taxes all his energies, and puts a severe strain upon all his best emotions. To a large extent it is work underground, whose progress he cannot watch, and which may often for a long period of time hardly seem to be advancing at all. It must of necessity be slow, and in the course of it there will sometimes come disappointments which will drive the worker almost to the borders of despair. Now for what is all this undertaken ? Where is the earthly reward which our brethren can anticipate ? It may be said that they are the victims of their own excited feelings. That men who have no true faith in the gospel, though they may profess and call themselves Christians, should regard them as fools and fanatics is not surprising. " God," said Paul, " hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed unto death ; for we are made a spectacle unto the



world, and to angels, and to men." If this was the lot of the apostles, so must they who have succeeded to their labours expect it to be with them. They are the true heroes of the Church, and their service to Christ is an untiring devotion inspired by love.

It is that love which enables them to accept without murmuring the loss of those pleasures of civilised life, and still more those sweet experiences of social and family affection, which are as dear to them as to others, and to go forth sometimes to solitary homes in lands where they are strangers and exiles. It is that love which supports them when the first flush of excitement and novelty, which may have lent a touch of romance to their work, has died away, and they are face to face with the stern realities, often loathsome and painful enough, of their new work. It is that love which cheers them in the dull monotony of years, in which there is nothing for them but the constant routine of duty, with but few bright and cheering incidents to diversify it, which fills their hearts with that enthusiasm for humanity apart from which their burden of life would sometimes become intolerable, which saves them from despondency under the crushing weight of some specially bitter disappointment. Before them, certainly, is no prospect of distinction or reward. The prizes of civil, commercial, or military service are not prepared for them. Their country finds often in them invaluable allies, whose unbought service may win for her—often has won for her—a sympathy and honour

among native peoples which may prove of priceless value. But their own countrymen do not appreciate their labours, are sometimes ready to regard them as enemies, and not friends. They have their reward, but it is not of this world; their deeds have an abiding record, but it is on high. By God's grace they make many rich, but they themselves are poor, and yet, strange paradox, in that very poverty possessing all things, while they have the testimony of their own conscience that they are in all fidelity seeking to serve God.

To the Christian critics, if such there be, who show any sympathy with the cry against the missionary, no word of remonstrance can be too strong. They are dwelling at their ease, in the full enjoyment of Christian privileges, and for them to tolerate hard judgments of their brethren, who are at the posts of danger and of difficulty, shows a sad lack of Christian chivalry, if there be not a still deeper evil—a want of loyalty to Christ. To them, at least, there are searching questions which may well be addressed. The cynical sneer at the self-sacrifice of their brethren—what does it mean? On the lips of the man of the world it implies a disbelief in disinterested goodness, and indeed in spiritual motive altogether. Can it be possible that they share this scepticism? What comes, then, of their own love to Christ? Is their own religion a mere outward show, and is this the reason why they are so ready to suspect the devotion of others? There is no harsh-

ness in such a suggestion—it is simply the development of the Lord's own teaching—"With what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged." This is only in accordance with common experience. The liberal man believes in the generosity of others, while the churl laughs it to scorn or traces it to some unavowed selfishness. It is the man whose own heart throbs with heroic sentiment who believes in the hero, and has an instinctive sympathy with all his aspirations. The large-hearted find it impossible to doubt that others are as unselfish as themselves, and though it may be that they have sometimes to pay the penalty of a trust which the worldly-wise regard as sheer folly, they go on trusting still, and in the long run they are gainers.

Christian brother, this spirit of generous sympathy and of trustful admiration should be yours. You cannot doubt the possibility of a love to Christ so full and fervid, glowing with such an intensity of passion that it raises a man to a height of consecration at which self is utterly forgotten. To doubt it would be to confess that you have not felt the first touch of that love yourself. Leave such doubts to the self-worshippers and self-seekers of the world, to men who have never been thrilled by a noble impulse themselves, and therefore do not believe in the devotion of others, to superior persons who sneer at enthusiasm. You are not of the world: let not the world's spirit dominate you. Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Sadducees.

A second illustration of this Sadducee spirit is found in the objection started by Judas to the loving tribute paid by Mary to the Master whom she regarded with such adoring reverence. Judas was not, so far as we know, a Sadducee, but the Sadducee spirit was manifest in his scoffing question, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" The gift was an expression of sentiment, but that sentiment was the tenderest and purest with which the heart could be filled. Mary could not interpose between the Lord and His enemies; she could not win Judas from his vile treachery, or the priests from their cruel malice; she could not rouse Pilate to a courageous resolve to do justice such as would have become a great Roman; she could not even die in the Master's place; but she could manifest her sorrow and her love in this expressive act. It was this that roused the malignity of Judas; but it had to be masked under some fair disguise. The plea was that of the mere utilitarian, anxious at the same time to be regarded as benevolent. Like many before and since, he posed as the friend of the poor when he was really the enemy of Christ. There could be no more significant comment on his work than the simple record of the evangelist, "This he said, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and having the bag, took away what was put therein."

One main objection of the Sadducee to foreign missions is conceived in a similar spirit. There is, it is argued, too much work to be done in this country

to allow of the expenditure necessary for the conversion of the heathen. The plea seems plausible, even though it is often advanced by men who show as little practical zeal for the work of the Church in England as Judas manifested in the cause of the poor. But, though plausible, it cannot be sustained by facts. It is so far from being true that an earnest missionary spirit induces indifference to the necessity of Christian service at home, that the very opposite is true.

There are, and, it may be assumed, always will be, men of one idea, who are so possessed by it that their range of sympathy is narrowed and their sphere of action restricted. They are not found among the supporters of foreign missions only; indeed, there are few great movements which have not among their friends some who believe that in their special work lies the secret of the regeneration of the world. Such men are not to be despised; and least of all can we tolerate any contempt for them shown by a class who never felt a generous impulse or did a solitary act in which was a touch of moral heroism. They are a strong force, for, though some over-sensitive spirits may be offended by their extravagance, their passionate zeal is a much-needed stimulus for others. In the work of Christian missions their zeal easily lends itself to such satire as that of the great novelist who contrasted, with characteristic power, but with an exaggeration in art equal to that which he condemned in religious conduct, their concern for the

unknown but distant people of Borrioboola Gha with the neglect of the smaller duties lying at their very door. The satire was mere caricature, and applied merely to individual cases. It has often been used as an apology for a selfishness which cultivates an impartial indifference to the sins and sorrows of the brother at home and the stranger in heathen lands.

The answer is supplied by the history of the missionary enterprise itself. It is little more than a century old, but if the objection to it be sound, that century should have exhibited a decline of interest and diligence in the work of Christian philanthropy at home, as the result of this distraction of thought and energy. But the opposite has been the case. The great institutions, which are the glory of our country to-day, are developments of the present century. My contention would be that this remarkable movement which has led to the abolition of slavery, the establishment of ragged schools, the institution of a hundred missions in which Christians have recognised their duty to their brethren, the new tone given to political reform, and the development of Christian brotherhood which is working such changes everywhere, may be traced to the same spirit which moved the Church to the fuller discharge of its primary duty to its Lord. It would be enough for my point, however, if it be admitted that the two are coincident, and that the friends of Christian missions have been found among the most active workers in the service of humanity everywhere.



How could it be otherwise? When the love of Christ fires the soul it must make it catholic in its thought, world-wide in its sympathy, liberal alike in its thoughts and its deeds, passionate in its hatred to all injustice, eager in its desire for the triumph of all righteousness. That is the true missionary spirit. The Sadducee temper—faithless, loveless, hopeless—is opposed to all. To listen to its suggestions is to quench all hope. It is the spirit of the world—the victory by which it is to be overcome is our faith. If that faith is to be robust and vigorous, listen not to the voice of the charmer, magnifying difficulties, suggesting selfish caution, infusing doubt of the truth of God's promise. "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Sadducees." It cares as little for the sins and sorrows of England as for those of heathendom itself. It will put on an appearance as plausible and use pretexts as specious as those which Judas employed. But its heart is selfish and its spirit unbelieving. Let its leaven enter the soul and it will be fatal to all nobility of thought, all generosity of judgment, all that is daring in enterprise and heroic in character. Take heed, therefore, and beware of the leaven of the Sadducees.



*THE VALUE OF PRAYER.*



## THE VALUE OF PRAYER.

“Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive.”—JOHN xvi. 24.

THE Lord in these words describes the mightiest force which was to be committed to His Church for its work in the world. Prayer resting on this promise is thus set forth as one of the most powerful factors in the history of the world. Scepticism sneers, denies its reality, and passes on in utter indifference; fanaticism perverts the truth to the encouragement of its own careless idleness, and excites fresh disbelief by its very extravagance; but to simple faith it is a source of constant encouragement that there is a Power in the world, independent of the caprice and violence of man, overruling the very mistakes of human folly and checking the abuses of human passion, and that that Power is moved by the appeals of prayer.

More things are wrought by prayer (says Tennyson in the parting words of Arthur)—

“ Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If knowing God they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them friends ?  
For so the whole round earth is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”

There speaks a poet with true spiritual insight. The man described here who has lost his hold of spiritual power ; who has exhausted every resource at his command when he has taxed the ingenuity of his brain to the utmost ; who, when baffled and disappointed, has nothing on which he can retreat ; to whom even God is nothing more than a name, seeing there is no communion between his soul and the Divine Spirit, might as well be a sheep or a goat. Leave out the brain and multitudes would acquiesce in the judgment. But that is just what Tennyson does not leave out. Brain-power there is, for there is knowledge—“ knowing God.” He knows but does not pray. Having all the signs of His eternal power and Godhead ever present to his observation and thought, he is so little affected by them that he does not seek Him.

The distinction suggested between a man and the brutes that perish is that the one prays, the other does not. If there be no point of contact with the Infinite—if the soul does not cry after God and rejoice in fellowship—if, with all its knowledge, it has no source of inspiration and strength higher and deeper, richer

and fuller, than that which belongs to the instinct of the beast—where is the gain? True, with my reasoning powers I may make longer calculations and better prepare for the eventualities it anticipates. But to how little does all that amount, seeing that with all its shrewdness the intellect may be baffled, and that its strength may prove weakness in the hour of difficulty and trial! But if there be a rock which is higher than I, under which, in all the stress and strain of life, I can find shelter and defence until each storm be overpast—if I have the assurance that things impossible to me or to any man are possible to God, and that God is the hearer and answerer of my prayer—if I know that prayer has thus a power denied to the wisdom of the most subtle, or the strength of the most powerful, or the courage of the most daring—I stand on an entirely different platform. This knowledge introduces me to an entirely new region—brings me into association with works done not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of Hosts—I not only understand what the powers of the world to come are, but I am myself, to some extent, armed with them. And so—as the poet concludes—my whole life is “bound by chains about the feet of God.”

But how? The question returns and presses with all urgency. In what does this power of prayer consist? It is very easy to represent it in tropes and figures, but coming to literal statement, in what does its power lie? The Lord tells us to ask and receive;

but what can we ask, with the full confidence that our petition will be granted? It will surely not be contended that every request which the soul makes to God will be at once granted. It is ignorant and short-sighted, it is selfish and wayward, it is liable to sudden gusts of feeling which, while they last, are supreme. Is it suggested that the power of Omnipotence is at its disposal?

The case has only to be stated thus in its extreme form to call forth a decided answer. It must be a wild fanaticism which would indulge such a thought. Certainly it is not the expectation of sober-minded faith.

Some light may be thrown on the subject by a careful study of the Lord's teaching in this closing discourse, unsurpassed as it is in tenderness and profound wisdom: "Hitherto ye have asked nothing in My name." There had been no need to ask while He was present with them. He met their questionings, corrected their mistakes, sustained them when they were ready to sink, cheered their hours of despondency, satisfied their longing hearts with His love and wisdom. But He was leaving them, and then they would have a sense of desolation and weakness, all the more distressing because of its strangeness and because of its sad contrast with their too brief bright hours of fellowship with Him. They would have a consciousness of their own faltering purpose and weak faith, and there would be none to whom they could carry the story of their hesi-

tation and uncertainty. They would have experience of that slowness of heart by which they had so often troubled their patient and forbearing Lord, but He would not be there to dispel their doubts or solve the problems which were perplexing them. They would have to undertake duties involving a daring and resolution altogether contrary to their common habit of mind. They had been trained as mere peasants and fishermen, leading lives of the most commonplace and unexciting character; they were to become heroes, leaders of men. Yet in all the demands thus made upon them they would be without the presence of Him by whom they had been hitherto sustained. In the prosecution of their lofty calling they would have to face many a danger and confront many a foe, and the Lord would no longer be with them to breathe into them fresh confidence and strength. But then comes the blessed assurance of the Master that prayer would bring them all the help that they could need. The need would induce the cry for wisdom and grace, and the cry would secure the blessing—"Ask, and ye shall receive."

The words of the promise itself need to be carefully examined. They are very comprehensive. "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father," covers the widest range of human wants and desires. But the qualification is equally definite—"In My name." The meaning of this is hardly to be restricted to a dependence on the Saviour's intercession. That is un-



questionably present there. They and we, inheriting the same precious legacy of promise, ask as Christ's disciples for Christ's sake, assured of acceptance through Him as the great Mediator. Our faith in the power of prayer is not based on any merit of our own, nor even a general belief in the mercy of God, and His willingness to succour His weak and suffering children in all the tribulation and struggle of life, but upon the glorious revelation of His love to every sinner in Jesus Christ. He, the revealer and witness of the Father's love, who came to earth solely that He might make known to us its fulness, and Himself accomplish all its purposes, has told us that the Father who has given His only-begotten Son, will with Him also freely give us all things. And so we ask in His name, and whatsoever is so asked will be graciously given.

But if this were all that is intended by this phrase it might lead to a very selfish conception of the use of prayer. We might accept this as an encouragement to a very self-indulgent style of religious life. It might even seem to warrant the evasion of duties which are trying to flesh and blood, which involve us in antagonism to the idols of the world, to popular errors, to the maxims and practices of Society, perhaps even to the prejudices of esteemed Christian brethren. To pray that God would by some supernatural process, which we cannot understand, assert the supremacy of truth and right, is a much easier work than ourselves to meet the evil and combat it

*à outrance.* Testimony is sure always to have its unpleasant side, and when the element of controversy enters into it, is attended with so much of reproach that it is not wonderful if many would gladly substitute prayer to God for this witnessing to man.

Or, again, in the administration of Christian affairs demanding wisdom, clearness of vision, resolute action, it is certainly very tempting to shake ourselves free from the heavy weight of responsibility by praying and waiting for God to free the mind from all perplexity, and by some wondrous interposition of His providence to make straight the way of duty and prepare us for it. But this is a mistaken conception of the office of prayer. It is not designed to relieve the man from the cultivation of those faculties and virtues which, in the ordinary work of life, are regarded as essential to success. The same careful forecast, the same calculation of resources, the same regard to the lessons of experience, the same adaptation of the means to the end, and the same recognition of the grand fundamental principles of morality are necessary in the council chambers of the Church as in those of the world.

In the work of the Church, indeed, there are elements of which the world can take no account, but even these do not obviate the necessity for the exercise of a sound judgment. Enterprise may well be more daring, conceived in a more hopeful spirit, prosecuted with more resolution even in circumstances which otherwise would be desperate, while

the promises of the Most High impart a confidence and strength otherwise unattainable. But there is still the necessity for the exercise of wisdom. Every gift which the Church or which the individual Christian has is to be "occupied"—invested with the utmost care, and so as to secure the richest interest. Prayer is intended to quicken diligence, not to dispense with it. It brings a new force into the life, by which every power already there is indefinitely multiplied. It frees the soul from the depressing influence of pessimistic fear, by teaching it that all things are possible, since the work is not of man but of God. The believer counts up all the forces at his disposal, but when he has reckoned them all he feels that there is an unmeasured power behind and above them all, and that faith in the power of prayer inspires him to redoubled effort, even where the conditions might seem to insure complete failure.

These remarks may help to a better understanding of the limitation which even the Lord's language suggests. "In My name" excludes the idea of requests of a purely selfish character. In this sense the first Christians clearly understood them. They were early met by a difficulty, which must have been sufficiently trying. Among the first converts, gathered as they were in great numbers, the pressure of need began soon to be felt. They did not ask for a miraculous supply in order to meet the exigencies of the hour. But praying for Divine guidance, as they did

in everything, they used their quickened intelligence in order to devise some method, and the method which they adopted was the institution of a common fund to meet the necessity. To suppose that they were laying down a new principle of life, and setting up community of goods as a law to which all Christians were to conform, is to mistake the spirit of the transaction. It was a temporary expedient, which, however, was an evidence at once of the strength of the new sentiment of Christian brotherhood, and also of the practical wisdom by which their counsels were shaped. If they had received the Lord's words in the extreme literal sense they would hardly have thought it necessary to have recourse to these extraordinary measures. Here was the very case in which it might have been hoped that the signs which the Lord had wrought while He was with them would be repeated, and multitudes be fed with bread from heaven. On the contrary, they recognised that the supply was to be met by their forethought and generous liberality. They prayed for light, for guidance, for impulse, for enlargement of heart, and it was given.

"In My name," then, suggests the predominance of a great motive. There can be no mean selfishness lurking in a prayer which is offered in Christ's name. It must be such a prayer only as Christ Himself would approve, as we can conceive it possible for Christ Himself to have offered. When we remember how He refused to employ the power in Him for personal ends we cannot imagine that He ever meant to

encourage such a tendency in His people. "Thinkest thou," He asked, "that I cannot beseech My Father, and He shall even now send Me more than twelve legions of angels?" The prayer which went up to Heaven—the most mighty and wonderful prayer, surely, that ever entered into the ears of the Most High—was, "If it be possible, let this cup pass away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done." There is the model for prayer. No mere child of man can have a right to put into his petition more urgency than the Son of God Himself employed. He prayed with strong cryings and tears. He was heard in that He feared, and yet the cup was drained to its very dregs. But the Father's will was done, and in that the prayer was accomplished. Is it necessary to work out at length the lessons of this incident, in itself the most suggestive parable as to the special character and enduring power of prayer? They stand out as though written in characters of light; and among the most prominent is the emphatic warning against the presumption that it is for us to dictate the method of God's work rather than humbly wait the revelations of His own will.

"In My name," then, is a caution against the vain dream that every caprice of ours will be gratified. Even every holy desire has not the promise of being granted in the way or at the time which may be expected by us. The outlines of the Divine purpose are revealed with marked distinctness; but the fillings

up are of the secret things which belong only to God. It may be necessary that the schemes which we have formed with extreme deliberation, and which are directed to the attainment of ends in harmony with God's will, should be baffled and disappointed. Men disturb themselves with ingenious attempts to explain, but this tangled web of Providence remains a mystery still. True, both in the story of our own lives and in the progress of the gospel in the world, there come times when we are able to see how what seemed to be checks and hindrances had an entirely opposite result, and that our humiliation was necessary in order to the fuller triumphs of the truth; in short, that, by paths very different from those which we had marked, the Divine purpose has moved on to its fulfilment. But until the result is seen, the process is unintelligible and distressing. We mistake blessings for trials, and fancy that God is closing His ears to our cry at the very time when our prayer is being most surely answered.

There is far-reaching truth in the apostle's record of the correction of his short-sighted judgments by the development of God's work: "The things which seemed most adverse have tended to the furtherance of the gospel." He would have prayed not to be sent to Rome. The trend of the events which issued in his finding himself a prisoner at Rome seemed to be directly contrary to all that he could have wished. Naturally he wanted freedom to prosecute his life-work. There were regions he proposed



to visit where the gospel had not been preached there were Churches he had planted which were making constant demands on his pastoral teaching and oversight. While he was thrust into dungeons, crossing tempestuous seas, dragged before heathen judges, the work which his heart loved was standing still. He would have had it otherwise ; but he came to perceive that it was good for the Churches, good for the world, good for the progress of the heavenly kingdom, good for himself, that it was otherwise.

What, then (some captious and cavilling critic may ask), is the value of the promise, and where is the power of prayer ? There is another promise which may help us to a sufficient answer : “ If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him ? ” The natural antithesis would be, “ give good gifts ; ” and so it reads in the parallel passage in Matthew’s Gospel. The suggestion is that in the gift of the Holy Spirit all good things are summed up. This is the teaching of the whole of the discourse from which the text is taken. The one consolation for the apostles in the season of darkness on which they were entering was the coming of the Spirit. He was to be in them, fulfilling all that Christ had been in the hours of His companionship with them. The wisdom of the guide, the tenderness of the Comforter, the quickening of the Life-giver, the inspira-



tion and strength of the Leader—all were to be summed up in Him. Whatever of sacred influence they had received from their Lord was to be continued by Him. For all the fluctuations of their changing life, its reverses and its successes alike, they were to be fitted by Him. His presence with them was not to be an occasional and fitful enjoyment, but a constant experience. “Ask, and ye shall receive,” and as the very enjoyment of His grace will stir you to higher aims, fill your heart with loftier ideals, enlarge your expectations, and encourage you to expect their fulfilment, your desire will become purer and more intense—the very richness of the gift will thus lead you to become more importunate in your asking. Your communion with God will thus become more real, more close, more intimate. The heart will ever become larger, and still as you ask you will receive.

The truth is we narrow the entire conception of prayer when we think of it only as a seeking for gifts which God will bestow. It is that, but it is much more. We ask God for wisdom, and He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not. We pray to Him for the bread of life, and He feeds our souls with the finest of the wheat. We seek the coming of the Holy Spirit, and that Spirit brings the things of Christ to our memories and hearts to refresh, stimulate, sustain us in the struggle and tribulation of life. Every good and perfect gift is assured us in answer to prayer.

It is a great descent from these spiritual communications when we begin to talk of God granting us some temporal blessings which we have earnestly sought, even though it be one which comes so near the higher region as the healing of the sick. It would be presumptuous to deny the possibility of such answers to prayer. The Divine mode of controlling human lives is among those "secret things of God" on which the humble-minded believer will be extremely slow to pronounce, and on which he will wait for the education of life's wondrous and chequered story. But what may be insisted upon is that prayer is something more than the presenting of petitions, and that there is an unspeakable blessing attending it, altogether apart from the actual gifts which may be bestowed.

There are some old proverbs which express in pithy terms the practical truth on this subject. "Pray devoutly, but hammer stoutly," is one, and it is sufficiently expressive. Steady, strong, persistent hammering is the kind of service which is at all times demanded of all Christians. It needs many heavy blows before visible impression is produced on the gates of the proud fortresses of Satan, whose frowning battlements look down in scornful defiance on the host of the Lord. The warfare is long, is difficult, often seems hardly to yield any result. And so it will prove, unless there be on the side of the assailants some power greater than man can wield.

Here, at all events, the battle is not to the strong. Victory is to be secured not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of Hosts. After all the toil and struggle of the centuries the defences appear almost untouched and the garrison as insolent and defiant as ever. Pray, then, devoutly to Him who can and who will overturn the power of the usurper and set up His own throne—the throne of Him who alone has the right to rule. But hammer stoutly : prayer will give new energy to your arm and new force to your blows.

Or this other : “ Pray to God, sailor, but make for the shore.” The devout sailor does not, in the hour of tempest and the presence of danger, cry to God for help and then leave his vessel to drift. In those terrible moments when death stares men in the face, he may pray who never prayed before, but he exhausts also all the means at his command for securing his safety. He prays, but he tacks, he takes in sail, he watches each fresh wave that comes rolling on in order that he may be ready to meet it, he strains every nerve to make for the shore. So in the difficult navigation through which our tempest-tossed bark is making its way, sometimes so slowly that it seems doubtful whether it is making any progress at all, sometimes so deep in the trough of the sea that its enemies may think it will never emerge, the exhortation comes, “ Pray to God, sailor, but spare no thought, relax no effort, strain nerve and muscle, and make for the shore.”

There are Christians who plume themselves on being rational, practical, men of common sense, men who would act on business principles even in religious work. They have little if any respect for the play of feeling or the exercise of strong faith. They would count the cost of every undertaking, and the counting must be done on very severe principles. There is little room for the admission of hope, for those brighter anticipations which encourage the heart of the worker. A strict calculation of averages is to determine the probable rate of success, and that success itself is to be estimated in the hardest, coldest, most matter-of-fact way. Of the success which is found in indirect forms which are only traced with difficulty, but whose influence is both real and widespread, no account is taken. Now all this is absolutely out of accord with the whole tone of the gospel and the experience of the Church. It has been an occurrence so frequent, that it is hardly too much to regard it as a law that "times of refreshing" come from the presence of God often in the most unexpected way. They are all illustrations of our Lord's own teaching: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit"—that is, such is the entire work of the Spirit. But it needs a spiritual sense to apprehend the view. It eludes the observation of those who are moving along in the dull routine of earth's pathway—their eyes for

ever fixed on the ground—their thoughts continually occupied with things of the earth, earthy, so accustomed to the sordid calculations of the world that they cannot believe in the realities which are to be spiritually discerned. But they are realities nevertheless, and realities which assert themselves in ways so wonderful that even faith itself cries out in surprise, “What hath God wrought!”

The reaction against this hard and worldly mode of looking at all spiritual work on the part of men of more Divine instinct, is strong, may even be extreme, indeed needs to be extreme if it is to have even an audience. The influences that incline men to acquiesce in what is regarded as the practical view are so many and so powerful that, unless the countervailing power be extreme almost to the verge of exaggeration, they will succeed in taking life and soul out of the undertakings of the Church. Let that spirit once prevail, and it is easy to see what the result must be. The ardent, the sanguine, the men of faith will be disheartened, their suggestions treated as the dreams of irresponsible men, their aspirations chilled, and their efforts checked and hindered. The faith, thus rudely and ruthlessly mocked at, will lose its vitality, or otherwise will assert itself with a resolution and probably a disregard of all reasonable prevision and judgment, which exposes it to the scoff of the enemy, and yet is necessary to the maintenance of its position at all. Happy for the Church where it has such power that it avails to save it from the coldness, the

faithlessness, and consequently the prayerlessness, which a servile deference to business principles would otherwise induce.

Business principles have a place even in our religious work. It is not well (as our Lord teaches) to enter on the building of a tower until we have counted the cost thereof. The Master Himself thus condemns those who fancy that they are honouring Him by setting at nought all the calculations of ordinary prudence. But to one who has faith in God, and works with the assurance that he will not work alone, to whom Divine promises are eternal verities, and Divine influence a mighty factor which is ever at work in the world, there are present other considerations beside those which are visible to the eyes of mere sense. That scene at Dothan, so graphically described by the historian, when Elisha and his servant found themselves surrounded by a hostile force, has, like those old records which some are disposed to treat with such scant contempt, deep spiritual significance. To the servant, destitute of the prophet's spiritual insight, there was no prospect but of immediate destruction. Chariots and horses were around them. They could hear the fierce cries of the camp. Already the hand of the foe seemed to be upon them. By all military laws—that is, on business principles—they were ruined. “Alas ! my master, what shall we do ?” was the cry of the young man, and it was so natural that there might seem to be no answer. But Elisha prayed, “Lord, open his eyes, that he



may see. And the Lord opened his eyes, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of chariots and horses round about Elisha." Oh! could our eyes be open, how often might we see similar marvels! The servants of truth and righteousness seem to be outnumbered, outmanœuvred, baffled, doomed to overthrow. All things seem to be warring against them. But there are unseen forces on their side. The Lord is not absent from the field, although for the time we see Him not.

Prayer changes the whole temper of the soul itself. It places it in the midst of new surroundings, it calls into play faculties which else would be dormant; it teaches it to see the relations of things in fresh and true lights. For the most part we dwell and are forced to dwell in the valleys and among the inhabitants of the valleys who, perhaps, have never ventured on an ascent, to whom the sublimity of the vision from the hill's summit is inconceivable.

Perhaps most of us have known the rapture of a first experience of the kind. My own memory goes back to my first view of a landscape from the mountain height. I have since seen other and grander views, but I travel back in imagination to what to the mountaineer of to-day would seem comparatively tame and restricted—as it certainly must be to one who has scaled the heights of the proudest Alp, or some still loftier summit in the Andes or the Himalayas. Yet even that short ascent changed the entire aspect of nature. The climb had been through



cloud and mist, and when at last the height was reached the effect was singularly impressive. It was as though we had passed into a new world. Not simply had we reached into a new atmosphere, whose strong, bracing, exhilarating influence was felt in every nerve, but we were gazing on an entirely new scene. We could estimate, as had been impossible before, the relations of different objects to each other. We could understand how we had been imposed upon by objects which had seemed formidable from below, but which, looked at from above in their true proportions, were seen to be feeble and even contemptible.

Surely nothing can better illustrate the effect of prayer. As we mingle with men who are accustomed to estimate everything by the material force it can command, or the immediate success it can secure, we naturally catch their tone of thinking and of feeling. We accept their verdict, and what they pronounce impossible we so regard. We look at events passing around us from the same position, and see them in the same light, and, naturally, we form the same estimate of their relative importance. The world is able thus to impose its own judgments on the Church. What scientists and philosophers think, what journalists say, how popular opinion is moving, appear to us matters of supreme importance. Some daring mind has started a novel and extravagant speculation that wars against the faith, for that is the feature common to all these intellectual sensations. Some

fresh attack has been delivered against a very central truth of the gospel. It is heralded with flourish of trumpets and loud boasts of victory; it is the subject of drawing-room talk and newspaper paragraph. Crowds are gathered to hear about it, the author is exalted into the lion of the time, and the daring novelty becomes the sensation of the season. Alas! all this moves us too much. We are surrounded by those who fancy there must be something in these movements—that wild dreamers may turn out the prophets of the Age—that the New Party may be the party which is to deliver and elevate humanity.

At all events we are perforce compelled to spend much of our time in a region of unbelief, and the atmosphere we are forced to breathe is depressing and enfeebling to the last degree. It may, indeed, have other qualities of a different but not less injurious character. There may be—alas! too often there are—poisonous elements which enter into imagination, brain, and heart, and work untold mischief, inflaming the desire, distorting the vision, deadening the nobler and encouraging all the baser and more unworthy sentiments of the nature. Prayer takes us into another region. We are snatched away from the influences which help to misrepresent the true nature of things, are taken into the clear light of heaven, are brought into communion with the thoughts of God, see all things as in the light of His countenance.

And what a change! How foolish, looked at under

these new conditions, appear the tremblings which have disturbed and agitated our hearts; how contemptible the boastings by which we allowed our spiritual nerves to be affected, how vain and foolish the attempt of men to overturn the counsel of the Most High! "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision." Down there we could hear only the Babel of men's voices, but here in this solemn stillness we catch the echo of this—surely of all sounds the most terrible and yet the most instructive, and to His servants the most encouraging—the derision of the Almighty. Then we were disturbed about the incidents of the hour, which to us seemed of infinite importance. Here, as we commune with God, we see that they were but as trifles light as air. Our thoughts are fixed on the grand purpose which, through the ages and amid all the changes of human affairs, is still moving on to its complete fulfilment. We understand something of what is meant in those simple but sublime words of Watts—

"Thine eternal thought moves on  
Thine undisturbed affairs."

We become full of that purpose. Below we were eager about the success of our plans — perhaps assured that wisdom was with us, and jealous of the honour which we fancied to be our right. There we learn our own weakness, are ashamed of our childish

ambitions and vanities, wonder only that we should be used at all, cry out with Peter, "Depart from me, for I am but a sinful man, O Lord!" But as the result we are wiser and stronger men, better equipped for all service, above all more full of faith in God.

Prayerless work is work done in our own strength, trusting for success to our own wisdom and energy, producing vain elation of soul in the time of prosperity, without any safe retreat and shelter in hours of difficulty and disappointment. It is the labour of the foolish, which wearies every one who has part in it. Without prayer hearts will fail and hands grow weary. Without prayer there will be vacillation, uncertainty, niggardliness, pessimism. Prayer purifies, strengthens, elevates, transforms the workers. But let it not be supposed that this exhausts its power. If prominence has been given to the spiritual effects of prayer it is because they are so apt to be overlooked. But it would be the very treason of unbelief to lose sight of the direct effect of prayer. The conversion of the world would, indeed, be a hopeless task on which it were madness to enter but for the promise of God. If we have not full faith in that promise we are wasting thought, energy, substance, on a visionary, a hopeless, an impracticable task. To the cry, "Watchman, watchman, what of the night?" the answer would often be sad and despairing enough but for the Divine word which assures us that the morning cometh. True

it is that darkness covereth the earth and gross darkness the people, and through its dense gloom the light is but slowly penetrating. But God has promised, and we work on.

“ God’s in His heaven—  
All’s right with the world.”

*CHRIST THE KING.*





## CHRIST THE KING.

“These all act contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another King, one Jesus.”—ACTS xvii. 7.

THAT was a true instinct which guided these persecutors of the gospel and its preachers in their attack upon the apostle. No doubt the charge they brought was the only one which was at all likely to impress the Roman authorities. To theological controversies—even those which might be raised between the worshippers of the true God and the devotees of the old idols—they were supremely indifferent. The questions which appeared of such infinite importance to Jewish Rabbis were in their view simply puerile—fit, it might be, to occupy the attention of a miserable Jew—but altogether below the dignity of a son of Imperial Rome. It was very different when the jealousy of the ruling power was awakened by the suggestion that these troublesome teachers were seeking to set up a rival authority by proclaiming another King, even Jesus.

All this might have been but the astute calculation of men desirous to find the weak point in the case

of their adversary. But strange to say the accuser had correctly described the aim of the Christian missionary. He mistook the nature of the kingdom, but he was right in suggesting that the apostle was the herald of the King. The element which is here indicated is one which has been too frequently thrown into the shade in considering the work of the Church, not only in early days, but in our own. It is undoubtedly true that the Christian teacher seeks to convert men to a belief, and that faith is the foundation alike of the individual life and of the entire Christian system. It is also true that the converts to that faith were to be gathered into a society first for purposes of mutual help and edification, and then for an aggressive work in the world. But if either of these or both of them united be regarded as setting forth the entire work of Christian teachers, there is a very serious deficiency.

The gospel was described by the Lord Himself as distinctively the gospel of the kingdom, and unquestionably the great aim of the workers for Christ is to complete the conquest of the world for Him. That would be a poor result which some seem to contemplate as the final issue if a section only of the family of man were to be raised to eternal bliss through the sacrifice of the Cross. Very different is the prospect which is set before us in the New Testament, "that in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father." He must reign till "He hath put all

enemies under His feet." Our work is to publish to the world His great message, and to set up His standard. The world has kings many and lords many. In opposition to them all, it is ours to proclaim "another King, one Jesus."

I. Here, then, we see the unity and grandeur of Christian work. There is an incalculable advantage in going back to this very simple initial truth which is the bed-rock on which our Christian enterprise rests. We are divided into many sects and parties, too prone to forget that they are servants of one Lord. We have our separate societies working on different lines and by diversified methods and agencies, and are too apt to regard them as competitors rather than allies inspired by the same motive and working to the same ends. Nothing can be more helpful and certainly nothing more necessary than for all to be recalled to a recollection of the one grand motive which inspires, of the one ruling idea which dominates, and the one grand issue which is present to the true ambition of all. In a great army each separate division and each separate regiment may have its own distinctive flag for the honour of which it is jealous, but the sentiment which is aroused by the common standard of the host is of a nobler and more inspiring character, and one to which it is peculiarly necessary to appeal if there ever arises a danger that in the rivalries and jealousies of these separate divisions the strength of the body should be weakened and the success of united operations

seriously imperilled. So in our great Christian work. Can it be doubted that there are numbers of Christians who need first of all to be awakened to a new sense of the dignity of their work? We are not functionaries, still less are we mere partizans. There is nothing which can so elevate even the humblest work, and so effectually guard against sectional feeling, as the thought that it is part of the great service by which our King is subduing all things to Himself.

Every influence of this kind should be welcomed, for it is sorely needed. Commonplace duties meet with but scant consideration from those who fancy themselves set apart for nobler service, yet their faithful discharge is just as essential to the success of our Christian enterprise. They certainly involve a severe trial of faith and patience in which the one support of the soul is the assurance that even in these little things the Master's work is carried on and His name glorified. The dreary experiences of a collector for one of our religious institutions are enough to damp the zeal even of the most ardent heart. The hope deferred which makes the heart sick, the cold and suspicious looks of those from whom, as fellow-servants of Christ, sympathy and help might have been expected, the cynical criticisms which chill the fervour of a soul whose enthusiasm has not hitherto been subjected to such callous treatment, the prompt and often rude rebuffs which yet are more tolerable than the smiling courtesies which only mask a refusal quite as decided, are sufficient

to make the work not only burdensome, but depressing.

So with that very necessary but eminently exhausting and depressing work of organisation. A committee, whether bearing that name or some kindred one, is indispensable to the healthful working of a great society. The alternatives are autocracy or the plebiscite, and the objections to both are manifest. But committees, as they almost invariably exist, are an arena for the exercise of some of the highest Christian virtues. A man who feels himself simply one of the units, but is nevertheless desirous that the place of that unit shall be properly filled, who does not aspire to lead but simply to discharge with all conscientiousness the duty assigned him, has his righteous soul continually vexed by the waste of time and energy on what seem to be miserable trifles. At the close of a session he feels humiliated at the thought of the waste of force. Under such conditions he is sure to take too pessimist a view of his position and work, and yet it cannot be denied that there is very much to justify even his gloomy estimate. It is at such times and under the bitterness of such feelings that the soul finds not only relief, but inspiration in remembering the sanctity and grandeur of the work to which even these obscure labours are still contributing something. The sentry at his solitary and distant post is forbidden to share the excitement of the fight, but his watchfulness and loyalty are the defence of the

army, and he, too, helps to win the victory. The stoker down in the hold of a great Atlantic liner, begrimed with dust and heat, is unknown to the passengers who observe and appreciate the skill of the captain by whom the course of the great vessel is directed, but he, too, is doing a service as essential to the onward march of the mighty ship across the swelling billows. So with the workers in the humbler spheres of toil in the Church of Christ. The district visitor, the collector, the member of committee who contributes to it only the vote which expresses a judgment carefully formed and honestly expressed, and the personal work to which that vote commits him—they are all members of the host of the Lord; they are all helping, to the measure of their ability, to establish the rule of another King, one Jesus.

II. The text is suggestive further as setting forth the inspiring motive of Christian work. The men who were dragged up before the tribunal on this charge of treason to Cæsar were, on this supposition, themselves the subjects of this other King, even Jesus. By whatever other motives they may have been influenced, these must have been secondary to the ruling principle of loyalty to the Master, whose rule they had come to proclaim. It was a very striking spectacle which they presented as they dared in that heathen city, where they were friendless strangers, to preach that a Jewish teacher, to whom even His own countrymen would not listen, but had crucified and slain, had been raised up by God to be Saviour and Lord.



Their own presence was itself the most powerful argument they could have adduced in support of His right. They had submitted themselves to Him as their King, or they would not have faced the dangers of their strange mission as the heralds of His kingdom. They were, as they boldly proclaimed, simply to do His will. Their action was simply dictated by His command, their one motive was love to Him, their hope was based solely on His promise. To them the judgment of the world on them and their enterprise was a matter of no importance. The scoffings of philosophers, the curses of priests, the fury of mobs, had all been anticipated and could not move them. They were indifferent to all because they had listened to the voice of their King. The old prophet explained the secret of his own mission in the memorable words, "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" Christ had subdued their hearts to Himself. He had called them to win others. They believed in Him—what could they do but speak?

The natural history of Christian missions is here. It is idle for us to try and construct some philosophy to explain it. It is equally unnecessary and unwise for us to enter upon a discussion with those who criticise our action and condemn it as contrary to all rational principles. The one answer to the most cogent arguments of this kind is an appeal to the authority of our King. That those who deny that should condemn us is only in the natural course of things,



and certainly need not occasion us a moment's disquietude. The antagonism here is one of principle. It is when we have to deal with those who profess to acknowledge the same Divine rule, and yet oppose its commands because they are not to be reconciled with the teachings of flesh and blood, that our difficulty begins. But there, too, our course is clear. There must be no toning down of the authority, and no minimising of the command. It is distinct, absolute, unqualified. To every creature is the gospel of the kingdom sent, on every follower of the Lord is the obligation laid that he should help to make it known. It may be quite true that there is no immediate prospect that this end will be accomplished, or at least accomplished speedily. Were we to judge from appearances, we might argue as did those in apostolic times who argued against the certainty of future judgment, from the fact that all things continued as they were from the foundation of the world. We may be told, as indeed we are told, that different faiths suit different races, that nations and men develop their highest qualities best under religions suited to their temperament and training, that the diversity which has existed always will exist to the end, and that it is better it should—in short, that our enterprise is not only impossible, but undesirable. Why should we attempt to refute the argument? It does not touch us. Were it all true, our duty remains the same. We are not the servants of the world to be guided by its wisdom. We are the

subjects of another King, and His will is with us supreme.

III. But the text not only indicates the imperative obligation of the work, it describes also its nature. Paul and his companions had simply one instrument to employ as they had one motive by which they were inspired. The words addressed by Peter to the blind man at the gate of the temple represent with great vividness the whole mission of the Church, "Silver and gold have we none, but such as we have give we unto thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." It is not difficult to picture the blank disappointment which would be expressed on the countenance of the man as he heard the opening words of a speech which dashed to the ground his hope of alms, but it is not easy to realise the rapture with which he would enter into the joy of his new experience, as he found that through the power of that name of Christ he was able to walk. His story is a parable of the course of the Church in the world.

The world looks up to the Church for some temporal help. It is doing so to-day. The highest tribute which could be paid to the Church is the complaint that it has not done more to redress the wrongs or banish the sorrows of humanity. Whatever be the special form of evil which has to be met, the first cry is—what are the churches doing? It is a tacit confession that from the churches ought to come the remedial power. They are the only societies

against which it is urged as a reproach that they have not provided a panacea for all social diseases. But the way in which the demand is pressed is often unreasonable, and shows a strange forgetfulness of the special character which the Church of Christ sustains in the world. Its work is the training of men, and the one way in which this work is to be done is by subduing them to the obedience of Christ. The man who has been brought to recognise Christ as his King is prepared for every kind of service which the world requires, and it is in educating men of this type alone that the work of the Church can be done. If, acting in its own special character, it undertakes the work of legislation, or of the proper adjustment of economic conditions ; if it attempts to settle difficult questions between opposing sections of society, and spends its time and energy in discussing schemes of social reform, it will assuredly fail. The service is one for which it has neither equipment nor commission, while by the neglect of its own proper sphere it will throw away the living force which it might actually have exerted.

Its answer to the world's demands, therefore, must be conceived in the same spirit, and will be followed by the same wondrous results as that which Peter gave to the blind man. The Church to-day has as little power to settle the tangled questions of policy, to make the rough places of the world smooth, and its crooked places straight, as the apostles had to relieve the pecuniary wants of the blind man. The power

which it wields is still that of the name of Christ, its call to the world is still the same, having in it for the ear of unbelief as little meaning and as little hope, but, for those who have ears to hear, charged with a healing power as that which brought the blind man a deliverance for which he had never dared to hope. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

The name of Jesus Christ was the power, and the only power, which the apostles possessed. It would not have been easy to find a company of men with less promise so far as outward qualifications were concerned. Yet from the outset their enemies were struck by the contrast between the absence of all the external distinctions which the world honours and the wonderful power with which they were endowed. The touch of their Master was on them. Pharisees and doctors of the law, scribes and priests, members of the Sanhedrim and leaders of the people had not lost the impression of the authority with which He spoke. Here they met the same magnetic force again. These Galilean peasants had a power which neither rank, nor birth, nor station, nor culture could give. One only force they had—faith in their risen Lord. But what a force it was! It had subdued their own hesitations. Out of weakness it had made them strong. They trusted to it, and they did not trust in vain, for the conquest of the world. As it was their power, so is it ours.

The Church of to-day is strong in the exact ratio

of its dependence on this power. It has at its command outward and visible forces which the primitive Church did not possess — wealth, culture, social influence, numbers, are all among its elements of apparent strength. Behind it is a history full of facts that minister encouragement and hope. But if it is ever tempted to rely on these and to forget that apart from the power of Christ all are but utter weakness, it will prepare for itself only disaster and defeat. There is nothing which it needs more at the present time than to be brought back to the simplicity that is in Christ. The temptation is often very strong to seek out auxiliary forces which at all events may help on the triumph of the gospel itself. Some find them in higher forms of culture, others in stronger developments of mysticism, others, again, in new forms of organisation. Never were there so many new schemes for supplying the imagined defects of the simple ministry of the gospel. On one side are men who insist that the name of Christ must be interpreted in an elaborate system of theology, on the other those who insist that priests and sacraments are essential to the true experience of His grace, while apart from them all are those who would have us hail Him as the great Social Reformer of the age. Amid the clamour of contending voices, all of which claim that the Christ is with them and with them only, the danger is lest Christ Himself should be forgotten.

“We preach Christ Jesus the Lord” was the simple

proclamation of the apostles. They called all men to worship and serve their King. That, indeed, presupposed much. Men will not worship a mere idea, will not submit to the absolute rule of a mere teacher, will not allow admiration for personal character or sympathy with personal suffering to win from them the homage due to God. To preach Jesus Christ the Lord must have been something far more than a repetition of the Lord's teaching or a recital of His sorrows and sufferings. It was an appeal not for sympathy, but for faith and obedience. It was to proclaim Christ the Risen Saviour. If the story of the Cross and the Resurrection were not true the apostles had no ground of appeal, they had no gospel to preach, they had no force by which to subdue the hearts of men. They exerted a power which confounded their adversaries, a power which has not exhausted itself to-day, a power which is transmitted to their successors so long, and so long only, as they are faithful to their true ideal, and by the preaching of the Cross call men to the worship of another King, one Jesus.

IV. Here, finally, is the earnest of success which encourages us in a work often pronounced hopeless. No missionary service was more hopeless, to all appearance, than this ministry of the apostles. Yet the enemies proclaimed that it was turning the world upside down. Thessalonica was but a picture of the world. What was done there was to be done everywhere.



We are too ready to admit of a distinction between Home and Foreign Missions—which proceeds on the assumption that the conversion of heathen people who have never heard of Christ is a more hopeless and visionary enterprise than that of the ungodly of our own country. But is this really so? Would not the unbelieving critic pronounce both alike a piece of mere fanatical folly, which can end only in disappointment? And is there not very much to be said in favour of this view? There is a baptized Paganism which is as hard to affect as the confirmed and stolid indifference of those who have drunk in all the superstitious follies of their priests until their minds are hardly capable of thinking a Christian thought.

The prophet, indeed, asks, “Hath a nation changed its gods, which are yet no gods?” The difficulty which he suggests is enormous. Habit, tradition, national pride, all the associations which have grown up with the people, forbid the change. Their gods, if not dear to them, are at all events regarded with that abject terror which it is the habit of superstition and priestcraft to foster. The force that is to cause them to cast them aside must certainly be a mighty one. But are there not idols which rule the hearts and lives of men who have been educated in Christian truth whom it would be quite as difficult to depose from their high position? The task of delivering the slave of vice from his degrading bondage, of raising the worshipper of money into a faithful and self-denying servant of the Lord Christ, of kindling the



heart of a formalist to spiritual devotion, of winning the proud and self-confident man of culture, who hates the very thought of any one being superior to himself, to the humble and trusting spirit of the little child, is surely not less difficult than that of converting a worshipper of dumb idols to be a servant of the living and true God.

It does not require much consideration to show that the sceptic's criticism of the missionary enterprise really means a contempt of the spiritual work of the Church everywhere. At its root is a disbelief in the distinctive truths of the gospel, in conversion, in the work of the Spirit on the heart of man, in Christ Himself and His salvation. It is difficult to understand how a man can believe in the gospel of the grace of God at all, and especially how he can regard himself as a partaker of that grace, and question either the possibility of the salvation of the heathen, or his own responsibility to work for that blessed end.

There is nothing new in the antagonism to Foreign Missions. The arguments which are used to-day are those which were raised when, a hundred years ago, our fathers commenced this work. There were in the churches then some who hesitated, who doubted the feasibility of the project, or shrank from the cost which it must involve—who had not the largeness of heart essential to the conception of the idea, and still more to its translation into practical work. But the objections then, as now,

showed a defective apprehension of Christian duty. The answer to them is not to be found in philosophic reasoning, still less in dry statistics. Our reply to-day, indeed, may be very different to that which the fathers could have given a century ago. We are no longer dealing with mere speculations, for we have a long and varied experience to which we can appeal. They, indeed, were not without similar testimony which they could have adduced, for the missionary spirit never quite died out of the Church. In the Middle Ages, Augustine, Boniface, Patrick, Columba and his monks were missionaries. At one time their work hardly received the honour it deserved. We appreciate it better now, and yet it is not to it only or chiefly that we appeal. A century of work has also been a century of success. Discouragements, disappointments, occasional reverses, frequent delays, tribulations, afflictions, and persecutions there have been. But they have only served to make the victories more conspicuous. We can afford to-day to despise the sneers and cavils of those who scoff at our work in the spirit of Sanballat when he asked, "What do these feeble Jews?" To such taunts, which were levelled against the work freely enough in those past days, we can reply by pointing to those triumphs of the gospel in which the work of Pentecost has been renewed in every land where the heralds have proclaimed the message of the Cross.

But I will not pursue this argument, tempting as it is. I will rather grant to the critic everything that

he can reasonably demand. I will admit that the great non-Christian systems have hardly been disturbed in their reign, and even that the probability of their ultimate overthrow, if looked at in the light of reason, has hardly been affected by such successes as the gospel has achieved. I will grant that even now the hope of a world's conversion must, to any heart but that of an earnest believer, appear not only dim and distant, but purely visionary. But while that does not affect our sense of personal obligation, neither does it weaken the assurance of ultimate and complete success. Our duty depends not on the probabilities of victory, even though those probabilities are for us not to be estimated by the ordinary laws of human undertakings. Even if the enterprise were hopeless, or if all we could anticipate was that through us Christ should be preached as a witness to all nations, the call of duty remains as clear, as indisputable, as imperial as ever. Our King has willed that His servants shall make disciples of all nations. Who amongst His servants can have a right to demand from Him the reason of His command ?

In that command itself may be found a promise and an earnest of success. Our Lord has certainly not called us to enter upon a warfare that is uncertain as to its issues. He must reign. The battle may be long, and its fluctuations may be many. To mere critical observers on the one hand, and to those whose keen interest in the issue intensifies their anxiety on the other, it may sometimes appear as though there

were little progress—if, indeed, there be not reaction. It is instructive to note how the same phases of the conflict seem to be reproduced in each successive age. Human nature repeats itself from century to century, and inasmuch as men are not converted in nations, but the battle has to be fought anew in each individual heart, there is a constant recurrence of the old varieties of unbelief and antagonism.

To-day, as in the first age, a great line of cleavage divides our congregations, like that which listened to Paul, into “some who believed and some who believed not.” The worldliness of Demas, the apostacy of Hymenæus and Alexander, the cowardice of those who forsook the great apostle in the day of his tribulation, the arrogance and conceit of Colossian Gnostics, the cold scepticism of those Corinthians who denied the resurrection—all have their representatives in our own day. There are times when, as we survey the field of conflict or listen to the cries of those who strive for the mastery, we are tempted to think that there is no advance at all. Four centuries ago Erasmus wrote to Colet, the celebrated Dean of St. Paul: “You are trying to bring back the Christianity of the apostles, and clear away the thorns and briars with which it is overgrown—a noble undertaking. You will find the task a hard one, but you will succeed, and will not regard the clamours of fools.” This is the very task in which we are engaged to-day, and the question that suggests itself is how far we have advanced, or

whether, indeed, there has been advance at all. But it is only a superficial observation which would suggest such a doubt. The kingdom is extending despite appearances which sometimes awaken the painful anxiety of devout believers, and seem to justify the despairing prophecies of pessimists. From the missionary field everywhere come testimonies to the living power of the gospel, and confute by the most practical proof the suggestions of mere scepticism. "How long, O Lord?" is sometimes the cry of sincere but impatient faith. Why is Thy chariot so long in coming? But "the Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness." We are trusting not to any hopes or intuitions of our own, but simply resting our faith on that Word which can never change when we believe that this other King, one Jesus, shall yet be King of kings and Lord of lords.

It remains as true as ever that we are soldiers of faith. It is faith alone that can sustain and strengthen amid the constant difficulties of the service. For the doubting, for the half-hearted, for the cowards who tremble before the sneers of rationalism and unbelief, there can be no place in this great crusade. The world's evil is not to be conquered by the carpet knights who love the tents of ease so well that they are afraid of facing the perils or bearing the cost of stern and resolute warfare. Among the professors of the day are to be found not a few who are not only unable to endure hardness as

good soldiers of Jesus Christ themselves, but whose endeavours to take out of Christian enterprise its soul of daring and its strength of faith, increase almost beyond calculation the real difficulties of our Christian enterprise. The gospel of Christ is hindered more by the apathy of half-hearted friends within the Church than by the hostility of foes outside. There is a terrible picture which Dante draws of such neutrals. They are found in all times, they abound most in days of prosperity and ease:—

“The sorrow-smitten souls of those whose name  
Nor foul reproach nor glorious praise did share,  
Mingled are they with those of evil fame,  
The angels who nor rebels were, nor true  
To God, but dwelt in isolated shame.  
Heaven, fearing loss of beauty, spurned that crew;  
Nor were they harboured in the depths of Hell,  
Lest to the damned some glory might accrue.

\* \* \* \*

No hope have these that they shall ever die,  
And this blind life of theirs so base is shown,  
All other doom they view with envious eye.  
Their fame the world above leaves all unknown;  
Mercy and Justice look on them with scorn.”

These are the men who halt between two opinions, who tremble to deny their King, and yet have not the faith or the courage to “follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.” Be it ours, by the gracious help of God’s Spirit, to cultivate that truer loyalty which hesitates at no sacrifice, trembles at no danger, which turns a deaf ear to every traitorous suggestion, and under all conditions is simply faithful to the King. So may we stand in our lot at the end of the days.









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